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Path to Conquest

A New Domain and New Powers for the Cleric

By Robert J. Schwalb

Illustration by Nico Photos

You stand at the forefront of the campaign to spread your deity's banner across the world. For you, conquest is more than victory through skill at arms or mastery of magic: It means absolute domination, shattering a foe's resistance and enslaving it to your god's will. Other clerics might be content to defeat their enemies and move on, but you respond to defiance or dissent with crushing violence. You seek to unify the world under an empire with your god and church at its head.

Some divine servants see domination as the ultimate expression of order and seek good ends by any means, including brutality, warfare, and tyranny. Fear is the ultimate weapon in such an arsenal, enforcing control by breaking an enemy's morale. However, imposing one's will on others exacts a high price. Many prayers associated with this domain draw on the power of the Shadowfell to bring about the desired outcome. Threads of darkness are woven into the fabric of divine energy that issues from those gods who claim domination as part of their portfolios, and clerics who embrace such power are continually tempted by dark impulses to wield it for selfish purposes.

This article presents the domination domain for warpriest clerics (introduced in *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*), as well as new domination-themed powers for all clerics.

Domination Domain

Many of Bane's warpriests choose the domination domain. Some clerics of Erathis also follow this path, in the belief that civilizing the world sometimes demands harsh measures. Although clerics of domination have a justifiably bad reputation, since they terrorize and ruin those that they deem enemies of their cause, not all of them are evil. An unaligned cleric who chooses this domain might seek to turn back humanoid invaders or murderous demons, reasoning that only a stern, ruthless approach can end such threats permanently. Good-aligned clerics of domination, though, are rare.

Level 1: Domination Domain Features and Powers

As a cleric of domination, you are an impressive and daunting figure in battle. Your commanding presence causes enemies to cower before you while inspiring fanaticism in your allies. Your healing magic grants others additional vigor to maintain the offensive.

Benefit: You gain training in Intimidate.

In addition, when you use *healing word*, the target also gains 5 temporary hit points. At 11th level, the

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temporary hit points increase to 10. At 21st level, they increase to 15.

You also gain the following 1st-level powers: one utility power (*inspire dread*), two at-will attack powers (*fell strike* and *icon of fear*), and one encounter attack power (*dread revelation*).

Level 1: Channel Divinity (Domination)

You can invoke resolve—at a cost. By conjuring a psychic lash, you purge fear and doubt with intense pain and fury.

Cruel Inspiration Cleric Utility

You lash out with a whip of divine energy, sparking pain but fortifying will.

Encounter ✦ Channel Divinity, Divine, Psychic, Shadow
Minor Action **Close** burst 3
Target: You or one ally in the burst
Effect: The target takes 5 psychic damage and can then make a saving throw with a +5 power bonus.
Special: You can use only one channel divinity power per encounter.

Level 3+: Domination Domain Encounter Power

Your faith is rewarded with magic attacks that force your foes to bow before your god's might.

You gain a particular encounter attack power at the specified levels. (The powers are provided later in this article.)

Level 3: *conquering blow*
Level 7: *dreadful warrior*
Level 13: *inspire terror*
Level 17: *demand obedience*
Level 23: *spirits of victory*
Level 27: *sundered bravery*

Level 5: Domination Domain Feature

Your healing magic is imbued with the spirit of battle. Not only do you mend an ally's wounds, you grant the strength and speed to get back into the fight.

Benefit: When you use *healing word*, the target can take a free action to stand up or to shift 1 square.

Level 10: Domination Domain Feature

You battle not only to defeat your foes, but to destroy their will to fight. A subjugated enemy is worth more to you than a slain one. Whenever you overcome an enemy with your fearsome powers, nearby foes hastily withdraw.

Benefit: Whenever you use a divine attack power that has the fear keyword to bloody an enemy or reduce a non-minion enemy to 0 hit points, you can push each enemy within 2 squares of you up to 3 squares as a free action. Creatures that are immune to fear ignore this effect.

Level 11: Devout Action (Domination)

Devout warpriest paragon path feature

As a priest of domination, your combat abilities and magic make you the ideal leader of warriors, a battle captain in your deity's cause. Your effort inspires a similar dedication in your allies.

Benefit: When you spend an action point to take an extra action, each ally within 5 squares of you can take a free action to stand up or shift up to 2 squares.

Level 11: Transcendent Blessing (Domination)

Devout warpriest paragon path feature

Each strike you make weakens your opponent's resolve, forcing it to withdraw before your advance. You wield fear as a weapon that leaves psychic wounds.

Benefit: When you hit with *fell strike*, if the target ends its next turn adjacent to you, it takes psychic damage equal to your Constitution modifier.

Level 12: Domination Domain Utility Power

Devout warpriest paragon path feature

This prayer causes the slightest doubt to reverberate into a shout in your opponent's mind. Attacks that force movement awaken primal terror in their targets, who, rather than stand and fight, curl up and hope the danger passes.

Echoes of Cowardice Devout Warpriest Utility 12

Your foes' eyes widen as your divine magic amplifies their doubts into fears, leaving them vulnerable.

Daily ✦ Divine, Fear, Shadow, Zone
Standard Action **Close** blast 5
Effect: The blast creates a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. Enemies in the zone grant combat advantage. When any enemy that starts in the zone is pushed, pulled, or slid, that enemy falls prone at the end of the forced movement.
Move Action: You move the zone up to 3 squares.
Sustain Minor: The zone persists until the end of your next turn.

Level 16: Domination Domain Feature

Devout warpriest paragon path feature
Under your divine guidance, your allies easily recognize which enemy is your preferred target. Upon seeing you bolster an ally, such a designated foe can lose heart.

Benefit: When you use *healing word*, choose one enemy in the burst. Until the end of your next turn, that enemy grants combat advantage.

Level 20: Domination Domain Daily Power

Devout warpriest paragon path feature
Though you are a warpriest of a deity of domination, you are only as effective as your allies. When they surround or can readily gather around you, the tide of battle can turn in an instant.

Ruthless Assault Devout Warpriest Attack 20

Divine might cloaks you in an aura that grants you strength and speeds your allies' attacks.

Daily ✦ Aura, Divine
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You activate an aura 2 that lasts until the end of your next turn. While the aura is active, you gain a +2 power bonus to attack rolls and a +4 power bonus to damage rolls. You and any ally in the aura can make a basic attack as a minor action once per round.

New Cleric Powers

These powers are among your options when you choose cleric powers of the given levels.

Utility Power

Inspire Dread

Your mastery of fear confers on you an unnerving aspect that helps you get what you want when dealing with others.

Inspire Dread Cleric Utility 1

You take on a ferocious demeanor, seeming taller and more menacing.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Shadow
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You gain a +2 power bonus to the next Intimidate check you make before the end of your next turn.

At-Will Attack Powers

Fell Strike

Enemies cannot stand before your towering fury.

Fell Strike Cleric Attack 1

Your display of divine might forces your foe to kneel in awe.

At-Will ✦ Divine, Fear, Shadow, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] + Wisdom modifier damage, and the target falls prone.
Level 21: 2[W] + Wisdom modifier damage.
Special: When charging, you can use this power in place of a melee basic attack.

Icon of Fear

Your stern confidence causes enemies to hesitate and drives those who fight alongside you to take advantage of the situation.

Icon of Fear Cleric Attack 1

Your weapon strikes dread into your foe while emboldening a nearby ally.

At-Will ✦ Divine, Fear, Shadow, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Will
Hit: 1[W] + Wisdom modifier damage, and you can push the target 1 square.
Level 21: 2[W] + Wisdom modifier damage.
Effect: One ally adjacent to you can shift up to 2 squares as a free action and must end adjacent to the target.

Encounter Attack Powers

Dread Revelation

You overwhelm an enemy with doubts and fears. You and your allies become daunting figures in its fogged mind.

Dread Revelation Cleric Attack 1

Your attack discourages your foe from confronting you and your companions.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Fear, Psychic, Shadow, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Wisdom modifier damage, and you can push the target 1 square. In addition, until the end of your next turn, the target takes 5 psychic damage the first time it willingly enters a square adjacent to you or any of your allies.

Conquering Blow

The domination domain deals with more than battle mastery and tactics. Overcoming your enemy requires you to break both its body and its soul. With this power, you force your enemy to the ground. If your foe tries to stand, your divine magic rouses your allies to punish its disobedience.

Conquering Blow — Cleric Attack 3

You prostrate your foe and inspire your allies to renew the attack if it stands.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Fear, Shadow, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One enemy
Attack: Wisdom vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Wisdom modifier damage, and the target falls prone. Until the end of your next turn, the target provokes opportunity attacks whenever it stands up.

Dreadful Warrior

A conqueror might be a skilled warrior, but a lone soldier cannot hope to defeat an army. This prayer touches on that principle. You conjure a spirit of battle to distract your foe, leaving it vulnerable to your allies' attacks, and to punish enemies that dare to move away.

Dreadful Warrior — Cleric Attack 7

Your strike calls forth the spirit of a warrior, once a follower of your deity's banner, to harry your foes.

Encounter ✦ Conjuration, Divine, Psychic, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Wisdom modifier psychic damage.
Effect: You conjure a spirit warrior in an unoccupied square adjacent to the target. The spirit lasts until the end of your next turn. The target grants combat advantage while adjacent to the spirit. When any enemy willingly leaves a square adjacent to the spirit for the first time, that enemy takes psychic damage equal to your Constitution modifier.

Inspire Terror

With this prayer, you hammer your foe's body and mind. Thoughts of danger in close combat with you and your allies overwhelm the enemy with mental anguish.

Inspire Terror — Cleric Attack 13

Your attack crushes the flesh and the resolve of your foe.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Fear, Psychic, Shadow, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + Wisdom modifier damage. If the target ends its next turn adjacent to you or any of your allies, it takes psychic damage equal to your Wisdom modifier.

Demand Obedience

With your divine authority, you order your foes to bow down before you and encourage your allies to better their tactical positions.

Demand Obedience — Cleric Attack 17

You brandish your weapon and utter a word of command, forcing enemies to cower and spurring allies to move.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Fear, Shadow, Weapon
Standard Action **Close** burst 1
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: Wisdom vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Wisdom modifier damage, and the target falls prone. Until the end of your next turn, the target provokes opportunity attacks whenever it stands up.
Effect: Each ally within 5 squares of you can shift up to 3 squares as a free action.

Spirits of Victory

This prayer calls forth the spirits of warriors pledged to conquest but denied victory in life. They set upon your enemies, creating openings for your allies' attacks and punishing foes who attempt to flee.

Spirits of Victory — Cleric Attack 23

You unleash a howling host of warrior spirits to aid you and your allies while punishing your foes.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Psychic, Weapon, Zone
Standard Action **Close** burst 1
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: Wisdom vs. Reflex
Hit: 1[W] + Wisdom modifier damage plus 2d8 psychic damage.
Effect: The burst creates a zone in a close burst 2 that lasts until the end of your next turn. Enemies in the zone grant combat advantage. When any enemy willingly leaves the zone, it takes psychic damage equal to your Constitution modifier.

Sundered Bravery

This mighty power freezes an enemy with fear, hurls it to the ground, and leaves it in a state of near panic. The stricken foe perceives every nearby movement as a threat, leaving massive gaps in its defenses as it shrinks away.

Sundered Bravery — Cleric Attack 27

Your enemy falls prostrate in terror, your divine power causing it to see foes at every turn.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Fear, Shadow, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + Wisdom modifier damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of your next turn and falls prone. Until the end of your next turn, the target provokes opportunity attacks whenever it stands up.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb works as a contract designer for Wizards of the Coast and has designed or developed over two hundred articles and sourcebooks for Dungeons & Dragons®, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars RPG*, and the d20 system. Some of his more recent work can be found in *The Book of Vile Darkness*, the *Spiral of Tharizdun* set of *D&D Fortune Cards*, and the novel *Death Mark*. Rob is also a regular contributor to *Dragon* and *Dungeon*. For more information about him, check out his website at robertjschwalb.com or follow him on Twitter (@rjschwalb).

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Character Themes:
Citizens of Splendor

By Andrew G. Schneider

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As the greatest mercantile powerhouse of the Sword Coast, Waterdeep is rife with opportunity and riddled with contradictions. The city is open to anyone who has coin to spend, yet a secret cabal of Masked Lords rules it. Renowned Blackstaff Tower exists steps away from sinister Undermountain, which is still deadly more than a hundred years after the Mad Mage Halaster's death. The threads of a thousand tales converge here, where anything that can happen usually does, and you're tangled in the best of them.

This article presents three new character themes. Although the Blackstaff apprentice, Halaster's clone, and the Masked Lord are tied to Waterdeep's past, present, and future, these themes are not restricted to the Forgotten Realms® setting, and they can be adapted for use in any campaign. The Dungeon

FOR THE DM: USING THESE THEMES IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

Character choice matters. Whether you decide to open the door instead of continuing down the hallway or to ally yourself with the villain and send your campaign off the rails, the effect of character choice lies at the heart of the collective storytelling experience that is the Dungeons & Dragons® game. When integrated into a campaign story line, character themes provide an array of interesting motivations to send a character adventuring, as well as a set of hooks for the DM. Significantly interweaving character themes into a campaign shows players that their character choices matter from the very first, and these choices continue to make a difference for as long as the theme's elements remain unresolved.

The themes presented in this article are full of sinister hooks and unanswered questions that are directly related to the city of Waterdeep and the Forgotten Realms setting. If your campaign features neither of these elements, you can still use this material. If your players are interested in a theme's mechanics, feel free to pick elements of the theme's description to fit your campaign world, or work with your players to create an entirely new background of equal import. For more ideas on reskinning themes, see the descriptions of the knight of Synnoria, the Northlander reaver, and the Darkwalker kin in "Character Themes: Heroes of the Moonshaes" in *Dragon* 405. Each of those entries presents new ideas for themes originally found in the *Neverwinter Campaign Setting*™.

If your campaign uses the Forgotten Realms® setting, the "For the DM" sidebars in each theme description offer a sampling of the possibilities that Waterdhavian themes can open up in your campaign.

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Master should pay special attention to the Masked Lord theme and how the role of a Masked Lord works within his or her campaign. Because Masked Lords wield power within Waterdeep and beyond as well, the theme can and should have deep story consequences.

For information on using themes as part of character creation and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore" in *Dragon* 399.

Blackstaff Apprentice

You always wanted to be a wizard. Your family did its best to indulge your dream, even when others told you that you would never amount to anything. You attended public academies and auditioned with private spellcasters, striving without success to master the techniques of an apprentice mage. Enchantment, evocation, illusion—every school of magic was a closed door to you. The simplest cantrips seemed to be out of your reach. You would have given up, but you were convinced that it was a matter of learning, not a matter of talent. If only you could find the right teacher.

Having exhausted all other options, you presented yourself at the fabled Blackstaff Tower. The new archmage of Waterdeep and the master of Blackstaff Tower, Vajra Safhar, had issued an open call in search of apprentices. To your surprise, and that of Waterdeep's magical community, you were among those whom Vajra chose to train as one of her new corps of Blackstaff wizards.

With your fellow apprentices, you embarked on an experimental path of study that demanded absolute understanding and mastery of magic's fundamentals before specializing in any one school. Under Vajra's unorthodox tutelage, you flourished. Then, on the eve of your first-year exam, Vajra vanished.

For weeks, you and the other apprentices waited, without a hint or an indication of your mentor's fate. Finally, with a heavy heart and a backpack full of books, you set out from Blackstaff Tower. You resolve to continue your studies, even as you search for Vajra's whereabouts. You're so close to being a wizard, it'd be ludicrous to stop now.

Creating a Blackstaff Apprentice

This theme focuses on the hallmarks of being a wizard and is therefore open only to members of that class.

Blackstaff Apprentice Background

Before you became a Blackstaff apprentice, the academies and private tutors you worked with provided a generalized curriculum in addition to the study of the magical arts. After sampling introductory courses at a variety of institutions, you have discovered a non-arcane field of endeavor that suits your talents and your interest.

Associated Skill: Dungeoneering, History, Nature, or Religion.

For the DM: Blackstaff Apprentice

The driving force behind a Blackstaff apprentice's adventuring career is the mystery of what happened to Vajra. In turn, this issue raises questions regarding Forgotten Realms canon. In the novel *Blackstaff Tower*, Vajra had an apprentice named Laraelra Harard. Was the apprenticeship program in your game one that Vajra instituted instead of working with Laraelra, or did something happen to Laraelra that prompted Vajra to call for new apprentices? If so, is Laraelra's disappearance related to Vajra's? Perhaps Vajra was captured or killed by a villain in your campaign, either while searching for Laraelra or performing some other duty as archmage of Waterdeep. Are the powers responsible for Vajra's disappearance now coming for the character and the other apprentices?

Another element to consider is the character's reception by the arcane community and the rest of Waterdeep. Is there any interest from other wizards in appointing an interim archmage in Vajra's absence? If so, consider what those wizards' relationship with the character is. Might the character be called upon to be such an interim instructor? What do the spirits of Blackstaff Tower, themselves former Blackstaffs, think of the character, and do they help or hinder the Blackstaff apprentice?

Finally, what is the status of the character's family? What do they think of the character becoming an adventurer? Will they use family resources (if any) to help the character in his or her quest, or would they prefer that the character find another mentor more distant from danger?

Class Prerequisite: Wizard. You must be able to prepare spells from a spellbook (such as with the Arcanist's Spellbook, Bladesinger's Spellbook, or Mage's Spellbook class feature).

Race Prerequisite: None. The City of Splendors is home to all races, and Vajra did not discriminate.

Starting Feature

Magic missile was the first spell you learned under Vajra's guidance, and she demanded the perfection of its basic form before you attempted other magic.

Benefit: You gain the *magic missile* power if you do not already have it. Once per encounter you can use *magic missile* as a minor action instead of a standard action.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

The Art blossoms within you, lending power to words and gestures you memorized long ago.

Benefit: You gain three wizard cantrips of your choice.

Level 10 Feature

All magic, regardless of school, acts according to codified principles. You have learned those principles backward and forward, and you can spot flaws in an enemy's spell as easily as you find them in your own.

Benefit: You add the *dispel magic* power to your spellbook. As a standard action, you can expend a wizard utility power that you have prepared and use *dispel magic* in its place. The utility power must be of level 6 or higher and cannot be usable at will.

Halaster's Clone

For over a thousand years, the Mad Mage Halaster Blackcloak ruled Undermountain, the labyrinthine dungeon beneath Waterdeep. During that time, he created untold numbers of clones to house his identity in case his body met with disaster. The clones were kept in stasis and hidden in safe places throughout Undermountain and the lower reaches of Waterdeep. Though Halaster expected death at every turn, not even he foresaw his destruction at his own hands. His essence was cast across the planes when he lost control of a powerful ritual, and before he could find his way back to one of his clones, the Spellplague struck. Only Halaster knows for certain what happened next.

You were supposed to be one of Halaster's clones—of that much you're certain. The safe house in which you awoke was filled with the Mad Mage's writings, which were meant to help him reorient himself upon assuming a new body. But something went horribly wrong.

You are not Halaster. Your body is far different from what is shown in the paintings and illustrations of the master of Undermountain. Your personality and skills seem drawn from another source. Yet Halaster is there too, his maniacal laughter bubbling up from the recesses of your mind.

It has now been more than a hundred years since Halaster's death and the onset of the Spellplague, and

HALASTER'S CLONE BACKGROUND

Your time spent orienting yourself in Halaster's safe house has bolstered your knowledge of the arcane or given you some of Halaster's ability to perceive the motives of other people.

Associated Skill: Arcana or Insight.

you have nothing but questions. Undaunted, you set out from Undermountain to create a life and a history for yourself; you hope to find the strength to keep your internal madness at bay. Halaster's power grows with every passing day, and this body isn't big enough for both of you.

Creating a Halaster's Clone

The magic that transformed your body and mind has opened up amazing possibilities. As long as you are always on guard against the madness within you, the features of this theme can benefit any class.

Class Prerequisite: None. Your skills and personality come from an unknown source, and you can be any class.

Race Prerequisite: None. Though your body was once that of a male human, it has since been transformed and can be of any age, race, or gender.

Starting Feature

The stasis magic that protected you for over a century is still at work in your body, whether you like it or not.

Benefit: You do not age. In addition, you gain immunity to diseases of your level or lower.

FOR THE DM: HALASTER'S CLONE

Before a player chooses to use the Halaster's Clone theme in your game, think about some of the following questions. Answering them can help you build a rich backstory for the player to enjoy.

How does Halaster's identity, which is trapped within the character's mind, play a role in the character's life? Does Halaster ever take control of their shared body, and if so, when? What does he do while in control? Does the ongoing battle for the character's body have outward signs or effects? Also, Halaster was the master of Undermountain. As the campaign progresses, does the character gain power over the fabled labyrinth? What is the character's relationship with Undermountain's notable denizens, especially Halaster's apprentices? Is the character hunted for the knowledge locked within his or her mind?

Just as important is the question of who—or what—broke the stasis effect, and why. Did something wake the clone for a purpose, and does that purpose reveal itself during the clone's adventures? How many clones did Halaster create? Are other clones free in the world, and is each one determined to be the "real" Halaster? Or do they attempt to emulate the character?

Was the clone's body changed by the Spellplague or another force, and are those changes complete? Where did the character's body and skills come from? Perhaps the character eventually meets the person he or she is copying. One alternative is that the character is one of the dead gods that populate the Forgotten Realms, now reborn. Mystra, goddess of magic; Myrkul, god of death; Baal, god of murder; and Helm, god of guardians—all these come to mind. How would the living gods react to the character's existence?

The above issues become even more interesting, and complicated, if more than one clone is in the party. How do they deal with the fact that they are both Halaster, and yet also distinct individuals? Regardless of their interactions, their shared past should help them in their search for truth.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

During one of your skirmishes with Halaster's personality, the Mad Mage let slip some valuable information. He believes the stasis effect was altered by the Spellplague, perpetuating itself within you in unusual ways, and the temporal magic might be harnessed to create other effects.

Halaster was right, and you have learned to loosen the grip of time in a small area around you.

Benefit: You gain the *alter time* power.

Alter Time — Halaster's Clone Utility

You alter the flow of time around you, granting your allies a few crucial moments to reposition themselves.

Encounter ✦ Arcane
Move Action **Personal**
Effect: You move up to your speed. Any ally adjacent to you at the end of this movement can move up to his or her speed as a free action.

Level 10 Feature

In the face of danger, the stasis effect surges through you, augmenting your reactions.

Benefit: You gain a +4 power bonus to initiative.

Optional Powers

Level 2 Utility Power

Halaster lurks in the back of your mind, rising up when least expected and threatening to take control of your body. You have learned to draw on your reserves of strength to fight him off, and you can apply that ability against other mental assaults.

My Body, Myself! Halaster's Clone Utility 2

You beat back the fog settling over your mind, determined to maintain control over your body.

Encounter ✦ Arcane
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: You are stunned or dominated by an attack while you have at least one healing surge remaining.
Effect: Instead of suffering the triggering effect, you lose a healing surge, and you are dazed (save ends).

Level 6 Utility Power

In your hands, time is a subjective force you can mold to your will. You have tuned your abilities of temporal manipulation, trading moments in time and gaining in the transaction.

A Skip in Time Halaster's Clone Utility 6

You spend a little time now so that you'll have some breathing room in the future.

Encounter ✦ Arcane
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You gain an extra move action, which you must use before the end of this turn.

Level 10 Utility Power

As blows rain down upon you, you wrap yourself in a modified stasis field, forcibly separating cause and effect. Every blow will be felt later, but for now you press on, living on borrowed time.

Bend Time Halaster's Clone Utility 10

A shimmering field wards you from help and harm alike. Hopefully, it will last long enough.

Daily ✦ Arcane
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: You are damaged by an attack.
Effect: You take none of the damage now. You instead take it at the end of your next turn.

Masked Lord

You are one of the Masked Lords of Waterdeep—a secret ruler of the City of Splendors. You're also a fugitive, hunted through the streets, alleys, parks, and marketplaces of your fair city.

While pursuing your duties in the Lords' Palace, you overheard a discussion among several of your fellow lords. Though their faces and voices were distorted by magic, their words left you chilled. Some among your fellow Masked Lords—you're not sure who or how many—have been assassinated, their positions and identities assumed by doppelgangers intent on taking control of Waterdeep. Disconnected events, such as an attack outside a tavern and the break-in at a friend's manor, are suddenly cast in a sinister light. Have you been discovered? Are you even now a target?

Everything is suspect, and trust is a commodity you can't afford. The identity of the Masked Lords must remain secret; there can be no investigation and no public inquest. You dust off skills you haven't used since your youthful forays into Undermountain and take to the streets. You need to find reliable allies. Perhaps adventurers or other Masked Lords whose identities are beyond doubt can help you reveal the doppelgangers without compromising your position. And you need to haul Dagult Neverember, the open lord of Waterdeep, back from Neverwinter. With Neverember's help, the Masked Lords can be purged before Waterdeep falls to the shapeshifters.

Unless Lord Neverember has already been compromised . . .

Creating a Masked Lord

A Masked Lord is first and foremost concerned with the well-being of Waterdeep. The best Masked Lords are versed in the arts of disguise and misdirection, hiding their true nature from friend and foe alike.

Class Prerequisite: None. Masked Lords come from all walks of life. Though many are former adventurers, an equal number are influential citizens.

Race Prerequisite: None. Waterdeep is a mercantile metropolis that counts all races among its inhabitants. As a Masked Lord, you could be a member of any of them.

Starting Feature

Even without the threat of doppelganger assassins, Waterdeep is not a safe city. It would not do to lose one of the city's secret rulers by happenstance, yet not all of the Masked Lords can publicly hire bodyguards. You were granted a magic suit of *lord's armor* upon your induction into the Masked Lords, and it was designed to protect you at the first sign of danger.

Benefit: You gain the *create lord's armor* power.

Create Lord's Armor — Masked Lord Utility

You call forth armor of energy to protect you in your time of need.

Encounter ✦ Arcane
Minor Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must not be wearing armor, other than nonmagical clothing.
Effect: Choose a type of armor with which you have proficiency. You instantly don *+1 magic armor* of that type. The armor lasts until you dismiss it as a minor action, until it is removed from you, or until you use this power again.
Level 6: +2 magic armor.
Level 11: +3 magic armor.
Level 16: +4 magic armor.
Level 21: +5 magic armor.
Level 26: +6 magic armor.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

Over your long years of city service, you have built up a network of friends and favors that you can call in, no questions asked.

Benefit: When you are in Waterdeep or in a city or a town allied with Waterdeep, you always have access to a safe house warded against scrying and other forms of divination magic. Additionally, you always have access to safe transport to any known location within a day's horse ride of the city.

Level 10 Feature

Your *lord's armor* has adapted itself to the dangers you face on a daily basis, offering even greater protection.

Benefit: While wearing your *lord's armor*, you gain a +1 item bonus to saving throws.

Optional Powers

Level 2 Utility Power

Assassins could be anywhere, but watching your back has become second nature. You never let your guard down, not even among friends.

Prepared for the Worst — Masked Lord Utility 2

You react as though you were on your guard, even though you were taken by surprise.

Encounter
No Action **Personal**
Trigger: You are surprised at the start of an encounter while you are conscious.
Effect: You can take a single move or minor action on your turn during the surprise round.

Level 6 Utility Power

You know the secret phrases to get the proper reaction from city officials. They don't know who you are, but they know they need to help you.

Keys to the City — Masked Lord Utility 6

You say the right things to the right people, and everything falls into place.

Daily
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You make a Diplomacy check.
Effect: Treat the result of the check as though you had rolled a natural 20.

Level 10 Utility Power

It takes energy and concentration to maintain a magical disguise. You have learned how to break that concentration and reveal those hiding among you.

No More Lies — Masked Lord Utility 10

You uncover the proof you need to convince the world you aren't crazy.

Encounter ✦ Charm
Free Action **Special**
Trigger: You make an Intimidate check against a creature you can see.
Effect: You gain a +2 power bonus to the check. On a success, any polymorph or illusion effect on the creature is also suppressed until the end of your next turn, when the effect then resumes.

MASKED LORD BACKGROUND

Your identity might be secret, but your duties often place you in the public eye. Years of service to Waterdeep have honed your statecraft, or they have imparted a deep knowledge of the city's laws and traditions.

Associated Skill: Diplomacy or History.

FOR THE DM: MASKED LORD

As noted in the introduction, choosing to add the Masked Lord theme to your campaign has some hefty story consequences. These people can affect Waterdeep and your story line in substantial ways, and that might be exactly what you want. If you've decided to allow a player to jump into this theme, you can ask yourself the following questions, and your answers should help you further determine how much impact that character can have on your particular campaign.

Each Masked Lord leads a double life. What is the character's public identity? Does the Masked Lord change his or her lifestyle to investigate the doppelganger threat, or does he or she continue performing the duties of a Lord as if nothing has happened?

Does the character have a family? A partner? Children? If so, who are they? If not, did something happen to them? As is the case with comic book superheroes, the family of an adventurer is seen as a liability—a weakness the villains can use against him or her. But what if the character's relatives can take care of themselves? What if they are part of the adventuring party? Do they know of the character's identity as a Masked Lord? Has the character told them about the doppelgangers?

As many as nine Masked Lords have been seen at one time in the past, though four or five is a more common number. The actual number of Masked Lords is left to your discretion, and it could be far higher. Consider having a large number of Masked Lords if your party features several characters with the Masked Lord theme. Banding together against a pervasive, hidden evil is smart, but remember that any one of them could be a doppelganger in disguise.

Who are the other Masked Lords? How many of them are doppelgangers, and what plans do the doppelgangers have for those they yet intend to replace? Do the doppelgangers know that the character (or characters, in the case of multiple Masked Lords) is aware of their secret?

The Masked Lord theme mentions the open lord of Waterdeep, Dagult Neverember, who is currently attempting to bring Neverwinter into Waterdeep's sphere of influence, as described in the *Neverwinter Campaign Setting*. What is Neverember's relationship to the character? He could decide to enlist the character's help in conquering Neverwinter before returning to Waterdeep. A Masked Lord character has every reason to travel to Neverwinter, and a campaign that starts in the Jewel of the North offers an excellent opportunity to have a party composed of both Neverwinter and Waterdhavian themes—and their associated story lines.

About the Author

Andrew G. Schneider is an author and freelance game designer in the Washington, D.C., area. His recent credits include *Shards of Selûne* (*Dungeon* 193), *Scarred for Life* (*Dungeon* 192), and *Reign of Despair* (*Dungeon* 191).

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Back-Alley Dice Games

By Dave Chalker

Illustration by Sean Murray

The tavern tables might be filled with **Three-Dragon Ante** players, but experienced gamblers, rogues, and lowlifes know the real action is to be had in the alleys outside, where a group can wager hard-won (or at least, hard-stolen) coin for big stakes. Passersby avoid the clatter of dice, since they know these back-alley games are taken very seriously; a roll might be followed by accusations or even the rasp of drawn daggers.

However, adventurers have plenty of reasons to learn these games and get involved. Back-alley denizens often have their ears to the street and can be valuable sources of information, so they might spill the latest gossip while playing a few hands of Red Rogue. A local crime lord who is also an accomplished Goblin Army player might tell you what you want to know—if you can beat him at the game. Perhaps your adventuring band needs to raise some quick cash to buy an important item for a quest; a few hands of Dragon's Hoard might be the best source of funds.

The following entries present rules for three of the most widely known dice games, whether they're played with the wooden dice of the elves, the iron rollers of the dwarves, or the common bones carved from who knows what. Each entry describes briefly where the game comes from, what you need to play, and how the game works. Each also contains a sidebar describing how the DM can use D&D rules to simulate some of the activity in the game for player characters and nonplayer characters alike.

Alternatively, if an adventurer is playing against multiple gamblers, other players can take on those opponents' roles. This measure keeps the DM from having to monitor the activity of a host of other participants.

Determining the stakes for a game within the game world is up to the Dungeon Master. For an easy rule of thumb, start with the lowest number of gold pieces that could be given out as treasure for the party's level, then divide that number by 10. Thus, after ten successful hands, a gambler could end up winning a small fortune.

Goblin Army

An old dwarven saying goes, "Never trust a goblin that boasts of the size of its army." Goblin Army is a bluffing game that is said to originate from that proverb, in which gamblers wager on the size of a particular "army" by looking at different-sized dice in front of them and guessing what the other players have.

Players

2 to 6.

Components

Each player needs a set of 1d4, 1d6, 1d8, 1d10, and 1d12. A cup to hide the dice for each player is optional but recommended.

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Setup

Everyone rolls all their dice in the open to determine the starting player. The player with the highest numeral showing goes first. If there's a tie, compare players' second-highest dice, and so on.

Stakes

The players mutually decide on the initial stakes. Each player antes the agreed amount into the pot at the start of a hand. The size of the pot might go up during the course of the game. After the stakes are decided for a new hand, if the amount is too rich for a player, he or she can drop out.

Starting a Hand

Each player secretly rolls his or her set of dice, hiding the result; a dice cup is useful for this purpose. Be careful not to change the results of the roll when hiding the dice. You can check your own dice at any time during the hand.

Play

The first player in a new hand makes a **bid**, naming the quantity of a given numeral rolled among all players. For example, a bid of three 3s is a prediction that at least three dice among all players' rolls are showing a 3 (including wild rolls, as described below).

Wild Rolls: Rolls of 1, 10, 11, and 12 are treated differently from others. Any instance of the numeral 1 is wild: It can count as any value for a bid. Thus, each die showing a 1 is wild; a 10 has one 1 and one 0, so it counts as a roll of 1 (wild); an 11 shows two 1s and thus counts as two wilds; a 12 counts as one wild and one 2.

Once a player has made a bid, play passes to the left. That player can either **raise** or **challenge**.

Raise

A player raises by making a new bid that increases one of the numbers in the previous bid (either the quantity rolled or the value showing on the dice). For example, a bid of three 3s can be raised to either four (or more) 3s or three 4s (or a higher value). Neither number can be decreased; for example, you cannot raise a bid of three 3s with a bid of four 2s, because 2 is lower than the previous bid's dice value. After a player raises, play continues to the left as normal.

Challenge

If a player chooses to challenge, all players reveal their dice. The most recent bid is assessed to see if it was correct or not.

If the number of dice showing the bid value (including wild rolls) equals or is higher than the number bid, that bidder wins the hand. If the number is lower than the bid, the challenger wins the hand.

For example, someone challenges a bid of three 3s. Two dice among all the players are showing 3s, and another one shows a 1 (which is wild), for a total of three 3s. The challenge fails, and the most recent bidder wins the hand.

Whoever wins the hand (the challenger or the bidder) takes the pot. The loser can then choose to double the stakes for the next hand or keep them the same. Players then have the option to drop out. All the remaining players roll all their dice again, and the winner of the previous hand makes the first bid. Play continues until one player remains.

INFLUENCING GOBLIN ARMY

Bluffing and reading the other players are the two most important skills in Goblin Army. The DM can represent these skills against nonplayer opponents by making opposed checks. If a player character makes a successful Bluff check opposed by the next opponent's Insight check, you can convince that opponent not to challenge (unless the bid was outrageously high). Likewise, a successful Insight check opposed by the previous opponent's Bluff check might reveal whether that person is bluffing.

Red Rogue

The Red Rogue is a legendary figure, particularly among those who live under the rule of tyrannical nobility. He was said to be a wealthy aristocrat who used his station to protect the common people from power-hungry nobles, in the masked guise of the Red Rogue. No one could be sure when or where he would show up, or whether any appearance would be his last.

Some people claim that the Red Rogue invented this dice game to humble other nobles who excelled at formal games. Others say that he did not invent the game but merely perfected it, never losing a single hand. Many are certain that the Red Rogue never existed at all, but this game of pushing one's luck has become widely popular nonetheless.

Players

2 to 6.

Components

You'll need at least 5d6 (possibly more) for each player. For ease of play, one of each player's dice should be a different color from the others (preferably red) to represent the Red Rogue. If you can't do this, designate a die to be your Red Rogue before you start the game.

Setup

Each player takes 3d6 to begin the game, with one a different color if possible. Set aside the rest of the dice to form a pool.

Stakes

The players mutually decide on the initial stakes. Each player stakes the agreed amount to start a hand. A player can drop out at the start of any hand, before the dice are rolled.

Starting

Each player rolls 3d6, keeping his or her Red Rogue hidden from the other players. The starting player is the one who rolled the lowest total showing (break ties by rolling another die).

Play

Starting with the first player, each player chooses to **hit** or **stay**.

Hit

If you choose to hit, take one of the unused dice from the pool, roll it, and add it to the dice you already rolled this hand. If the number rolled on that die matches any of your other visible dice (not your Red Rogue), you must immediately roll another unused die and add that to your others.

If the total of your revealed dice and your Red Rogue is 19 or higher, you **bust** and immediately reveal all your dice. Your stake goes into the pot, and your turn is over.

If your total is 18 or lower, you once again choose to hit or stay. Keep in mind that the more dice you roll, the greater the chance that you will roll a number matching one you already rolled.

INFLUENCING RED ROGUE

Though some information is hidden, Red Rogue is less about bluffing and more about estimating odds and pushing your luck. The DM might allow an Intelligence check to help participants decide whether to roll again or not. Once per game, on a successful check, a player can roll two dice instead of one and use either result. (Doing so still counts as rolling one die; return the other to the pool of unused dice.)

Stay

If you choose to stay, you stop rolling. Keep your Red Rogue die hidden. Play passes to the next player in increasing order of original visible total.

Ending a Hand

Once all players have either chosen to stay or busted, all dice are revealed. The player whose total (including the Red Rogue) is closest to 18 wins the pot. In case of a tie, the pot goes to the player who rolled the most dice to get his or her total. If there is still a tie, the pot goes to the player with the highest value rolled on his or her Red Rogue. If players are still tied, the pot is split between them.

To start a new hand, players start over with 3d6 each and put up stakes again. The game continues until all players decide to stop.

Dragon's Hoard

Killing a dragon and taking its treasure is the ultimate challenge in the Dungeons & Dragons world. However, very few adventurers succeed in this quest, and most people would rather just skip the fighting and cut straight to the rewards. Dragon's Hoard simulates dividing up a large, diverse treasure. Some adventurers even use the game as training to be better bargainers when every party member wants the best stuff.

Players

2 to 4.

Components

For a two-player game, you need 24d6. A three-player game requires 36d6, and a four-player game needs 64d6. For ease of play, each player should bring some dice to the table.

Setup

Each player rolls 2d6; whoever rolls the highest total goes first. Place all the dice in a pool for players to draw from during the game.

Stakes

Before each game, the players decide on the stakes. Each player antes the agreed amount to the pot. However, players might be required to contribute additional funds to the pot at the end, so each must start the game with at least twice the stakes amount.

Play

Play takes place over a number of rounds, with each player going first once per round. To start a round, the first player takes a number of dice from the pool

equal to twice the number of players in the game, then rolls all those dice in the middle of the table. That player then divides all the dice into a number of groups equal to the number of players in the game. The groups do not have to have an equal number of dice in them, but each must contain at least one die.

After the first player has divided up the dice, the player to his or her left chooses and collects one group, then the next player to the left, and so on, until each other player has chosen a group; the first player takes the last remaining group of dice. Play then proceeds to the left, with the next player rolling and dividing up the dice. The round is complete when each player has taken a turn as the divider.

Collecting Dice

Whenever you choose a group of dice, sort them into smaller sets according to what numeral they are showing and leave them in front of you for the rest of the game. When you collect more dice in later rounds, sort them into the existing sets.

If any of the dice you collected are showing a 6, reroll those dice immediately when you collect them. If you roll anything but another 6, place the die in the appropriate set showing the new value. If you roll another 6 on any die, you choose what value it shows and place it in the appropriate set (even one that contains no dice). Thus, groups containing 6s are unpredictable until they are collected.

Game End

In a three- or four-player game, the game ends after two rounds; a two-player game ends after three rounds. (If you don't have enough dice for all rounds, players can record their sets after each round with pencil and paper.)

Scoring

At the end of the game, each player counts up each set of dice he or she has collected. If a set contains one to three dice showing a given value, it scores a number of points equal to that value times the number of dice showing it. If a set contains four or more dice showing a given value, it instead scores a **negative** number of points equal to that value times the number of dice showing it. A player who has collected none of a given value scores no points for it.

The player with the lowest score must pay an additional stake to the pot equal to the ante. The player with the highest score then takes three-quarters of the pot, and the player with the next-highest score takes the remaining amount. In a two-player game, winner takes all.

INFLUENCING DRAGON HOARD

Nothing is hidden in Dragon's Hoard, but the game includes an aspect of negotiation, figuring out what people want by looking at what they already have.

The DM can represent this skill against nonplayer opponents by allowing a Diplomacy check opposed by an Insight check. If the check is successful, the DM might rule that a nonplayer opponent is compelled to take a specified group of dice, provided that doing so seems reasonable. At the very least, a successful check by a participant might prevent an opponent from leaving that player a group of dice that hurts his or her score.

Scoring Example

I have collected the following dice in a three-player game:

1,1,1
2,2,2,2
3,3,3
5,5

Three 1s scores 3 points (3 × 1).
Four 2s score -8 points (-4 × 2).
Three 3s score 9 points (3 × 3).
I have no 4s, so I score 0 points.
Finally, two 5s score 10 points (5 × 2).

So my final score is: 3 - 8 + 9 + 0 + 10 = 14.

About the Author

Dave Chalker is a freelance game designer and editor-in-chief of the award-winning blog Critical-Hits.com. His recent work includes "Class Acts: Assassin—Secrets of the Ninja" in *Dragon* 404 and "Rumble in the Valley" in *Dungeon* 193, as well as serving as a developer on the upcoming *Dragon Brigade Roleplaying Game*, *Cortex+ Hacker's Guide*, and *Marvel Superheroes Roleplaying Game* for Margaret Weis Productions. See his thoughts about games and breakfast sandwiches at @DaveTheGame on Twitter.

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Talking the Talk

Thieves' Cant in Your Game

By Alana Joli Abbott

Illustration by Ben Wootten

Vanessa twisted her purse strings around her fingers absently before realizing that such behavior would draw attention to her purse—exactly what she didn't want in this part of town. She walked more quickly, scanning the signs for the tavern where she was to meet her potential new hires. There, lit by torches, was a shingle that showed a small wedge of steel and the words "The Little Alderman." She was as good as there.

Two men stood by the window, their faces shaded, and she walked slowly as she passed them, hoping to overhear any nefarious implications of their conversation.

"Ste tehel labne ken kal?" one said, and she blinked, her hand on the door. She thought herself well versed in languages, but that one she didn't recognize.

The other let out a guffaw. "Come now, Arin. Labne o tryn kene kal. Gave it to the abbess at the academy straight after."

Well, at least the ruffians were educated churchgoers, she supposed.

It was no surprise that, a few moments after she had secured a corner table, the two entered and headed her way. They made an odd pair: one short and swarthy, with a nose

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that looked to have been broken at least twice, the other tall and gentlemanly, boasting a well-maintained mustache. She stood, but the short man waved her down.

"No obark need stand for a pair of basimbasim," he announced in a rough voice (the one she had first heard outside), then sat across from her. The more charming of the pair settled beside her.

"Word is that you need a hack in the business of asset reallocation," the charmer said without preamble.

The short man took over. "If you've got signals and are earnest, we're the rounders you need. Ain't a joke can stand against Telner's jemmies."

She looked at the charming man blankly. He smiled. "If you've got a plan, and can pay, Arin and I can clear your way against any unfortunate obstacles."

Vanessa nodded, thinking not for the first time that she was in over her head.

Thieves' cant has long been a staple of the game table and of fantasy literature, but bringing it into a campaign can be a challenge. Few people have the patience or the inclination to learn the full language, a mishmash of slang and grammar based on old Romany. But knowing a few phrases of the secret tongue could turn the heads of your fellow players—and make clear just how different thieves' cant is from Common or other languages.

A simple trick to achieve the same flavorful result is to sprinkle your character's dialogue with slang words that sound familiar in English but have different definitions when spoken among thieves. A classy breed of rogue might use euphemisms for his or her trade; for example, a gentleman burglar might say he's in acquisitions, and a forger could advertise her services as a calligrapher. Which of these styles you adopt depends on how much effort you want to put into this aspect of your character and the style of rogue you want to portray.

In a Word, Argot

Classical thieves' cant is considered an argot: a secret language used by a group of people to speak in the presence of outsiders without being understood by them. Sometimes an argot is intentionally designed; other times, it's simply shop talk that is understandable to anyone familiar with its terms. Any shared vocabulary that is unfamiliar to outsiders could be classified as an argot. For example, a classical musician with no experience playing the Dungeons & Dragons game might be baffled by conversations about crits and d20s; on the other hand, a gamer with no musical training could be equally perplexed by fermata notations or bars of music in 5/4 time. And both might mistakenly believe that a sailor discussing a PFD (personal flotation device, also known as a life jacket) is confused about the PDF file format. Some argots are more complex than others.

Scholars disagree over whether the original thieves' cant, recorded in the 1530s, is a true language or an argot. Possibly based on the language of the Romany people (commonly referred to as gypsies), it had its own grammar with strict rules for word order. However, thieves' cant soon integrated vocabulary from both Romany and English and began to shift from a full language to a collection of terms that could be interspersed into normal English conversation. Different dialects also developed; the speech of Romany immigrants was closer to a true language than the argot of thieves, who spoke a higher form of cant than beggars.

Scholars began recording cant for posterity in dictionaries as early as the 1560s in the hope that familiarizing ordinary folk with the language of criminals would reduce their likelihood of being victims of a crime. The language was also a popular device among Elizabethan writers, including Shakespeare, who began using bits of thieves' cant in their plays and stories. Though in recent years it has grown more

Origin in the Game

In October 1982, *Dragon* #66 published an extensive "primer for the language of larceny" by Aurelio Locsin. In it, the author discusses pronunciation and grammar, then goes on to produce a foldable dictionary of the argot's earliest form for gamers to bring to the table. This treatment reflected the rules at the time that defined thieves' cant as a unique language, which had to be learned like any other.

Locsin notes that cant has no articles (a, an, and the) and that plurals are words repeated, so that "box" is *kal*, while "boxes" is *kalkal*. If you want to describe very big boxes, you would say *siosio kalkal*; *sio* means any sort of increase in size or value. Because modifiers (adjectives and adverbs) describe whatever word they are closest to, the word order in cant ends up being quite strange: "The fast man runs slowly," for example, comes out as *Obok sen koma ark*, which literally translates to "Slowness run speed man."

Here's a sampling of phrases from that presentation, including two that are used in the passage at the start of this article.

- *Ste tehel labne ken kal?* Who stole the box yesterday?
- *Labne o tryn kene kal.* Yesterday I saw you steal the box.
- *Te ken kal!* Steal a box!
- *Labne bano.* I went yesterday.
- *Kar bano.* I will go.
- *Kutin bano beti mublini.* I might go if it rains.
- *Beti tyni barbo, takin bano.* If he had a boat, I would go.
- *Mone kawabi. Nafeni o.* You are a cleric. Help me.

popular in fantasy fiction (such as Patricia Wrede's *Mairelon the Magician* and Tamora Pierce's *Terrier* and its sequels), Charles Dickens made extensive use of the slang for his character the Artful Dodger in *Oliver Twist*, and historical romance writer Georgette Heyer used cant in several of her novels, written in the mid-1900s. Even in modern English, fragments of the cant remain in expressions such as "higgledy-piggledy" and "bilk."

Hugo's Argot

English isn't the only language to have a thieves' cant. In France, the word "argot" was coined to describe the cant of a particular group of thieves in the 1620s. Author Victor Hugo used argot in his famous novel *Les Miserables*, and he studied the language as well, declaring it a corruption of French. In the novel, he wrote, "What is argot, properly speaking? Argot is the language of misery."

Although Hugo saw argot as miserable, and the old Romany cant remains impenetrable, the thieves' cant that most gamers are familiar with is largely adapted from the British slang of the early 1700s through the Victorian era, as recorded in the sources *The Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (Nathan Bailey, 1736) and *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1811 edition). These two sources and a host of other old books are available online, to be perused for interesting phrases beyond those included in this article.

Skill or Language?

Players and DMs have a few ways to represent thieves' cant in their game. Review the options presented below and determine which style of use makes the most sense in your campaign.

The most obvious option is to represent thieves' cant as a use of the Thievery skill; as with picking locks or disabling traps, learning cant is just a part of the trade. Because Thievery is based on Dexterity, you might wish to treat the communication as hand signals or sign language. For example, black-market traders might chat about the weather while tapping their fingers against each other's wrists to convey information about an illicit sale. Other hand signals might be used to maintain necessary silence while announcing the presence of a trap, a lock, or guards ahead.

Players who want to treat cant more like an independent language might prefer to associate it with Streetwise instead. This Charisma-based skill reflects the ease with which a character communicates, using the right words to get the point across without tipping off the "traps" (the watch). For a rogue in his or her home town, only an easy check is needed to succeed; but because the particulars of thieves' cant can vary widely from one area to another, the DC of such checks is likely to increase the farther away from home he or she goes.

Both of these options require that a character have training in the appropriate skill, or at least have a decently high score in the relevant ability.

Some players and DMs might prefer to make thieves' cant a true language, as was the case in earlier versions of the game. A starting character can choose it as a bonus language if he or she has the option to do so. Alternatively, the Linguist feat allows access to three additional languages, of which thieves' cant could be one.

Worlds of Difference

Particular campaign settings could well have their own nuances of thieves' cant, especially as slang rather than a full language. In the world of Eberron, for example, cant speakers might refer to the lightning rail as a "flash rumble-tumble": a fast coach that runs on magic. A thief in Sharn might talk about "the oaks up top," speaking of the rich people living in the highest buildings in the city. You might hear of someone "taking the side of the Traveler" when playing devil's advocate, or swear by "Six, Sparks, and Sovs," referring to the Dark Six, the Silver Flame, and the Sovereign Host.

In the Dark Sun setting, Gulg might be called "Itchland"; since that city is blessed with more water than others in Athas, its inhabitants might also have a propensity for lice and thus cause for itching. Bodach could be referred to as *hunaholyat*, or "death city"; rogues intending to go there are likely to "go legit" (die).

A Lot or a Little?

What style of cant works best for your rogue? To learn something of the language in general—or at least a detailed description of the oldest version of thieves' cant—your best option is to seek out Locsin's excellent extensive primer, which covers pronunciation, word formation, and word order thoroughly.

For a more accessible but still extensive addition to your game, you can take the words and phrases detailed at the end of this article and sprinkle them into your rogue's dialogue. Though only a smattering of vocabulary has been collected here, several old dictionaries of cant are available in the public domain, and you can find reproductions of the eighteenth-century dictionaries online. In addition, writer Stephen Hart has compiled an in-depth collection of slang and other useful historical references at his *18th Century Resources* website (http://www.pascalbonenfant.com/18c/cant), complete with a search engine to help you find the phrase you're looking for!

What if, rather than being a lowbrow criminal, your rogue is a member of a secret society? Code words and catchphrases are vital for those in the spy industry or otherwise engaged in covert operations. A thesaurus can be your friend at the game table, allowing you to cover your activities with perfectly legal-sounding words, such as "acquisition" in place of "theft." You might also invent phrases or symbols to help you identify members of your secret organization. A password can be as obtuse as "the red dog barks at midnight" or as obvious as "the package has been delivered." It could be a question ("Have you seen the eclipse?") along with a prearranged answer ("No, but I will see the one that is coming"). Alternatively, you might wear a bit of an identifying color, or invent a secret handshake or a knock.

Slinging the Slang

The opening passage of this article uses a few of the entries in the list below to illustrate a version of thieves' cant that's made up mostly of alternative meanings for everyday words. A slang term of this sort might hint at its true meaning (for example, "bones"), but in most cases the connection between a term and its meaning is obscure or misleading to the uninitiated.

Abbess: A madam.

Academy: Brothel.

Affidavit man: False witness. Also *knight of the post*.

Air and exercise: A whipping. Also *cly the jerk* (to receive a whipping), *flogging*, *hue*, *teize*.

Angler: Thief who draws in victims in order to rob them.

Arch rogue: Leader of a guild of thieves. Also *prince prig*, *upright man*.

Ard: Stolen.

Ark: Boat. Also *swimmer*.

Aunt: A harlot.

Autem diver: Pickpocket. Also *buzman*, *foist*, *purse collector*, *reader merchant*.

Bagged flash: Magic item.

Bam: Cheat. Also *cog*, *nap*, *slur*.

Bamboozle: Make a fool of someone.

Bawd: A magistrate.

Beef: Wound.

Beggar maker: Tavern owner.

Bene: Good. Also *rum*.

Birds of a feather: Gang or guild.

Bite: Trap.

Bones: Dice.

Box-man: Safecracker.

Bread: Money. Also *iron*, *king's pictures*, *plate*, *ready*, *wedge*.

Brother of the blade: Soldier. Also *beef eater*, *foot wabbler*, *swod*, *swodkin*.

Brother of the string: Bard. Also *crowdero*, *sheepskin fiddler*, *tormentor of catgut*, *wait*, *zany*.

Bruiser: Fighter. Also *fibbing-gloak*, *nulling cove*.

Burn the ken: Escape. Also *hike*, *rub*.

Button: A fake coin.

Chaunt: Song.

Click: Hit. Also *dowse*.

Clod hopper: Farmer.

Cove: Man.

Crash: Kill. Also *hush*, *use up*.

Cry beef: Call for the watch.

Cull: Honest man.

Danglestuff: Rope.

Darbies: Manacles.

Darkmans: Night.

Dawb: Bribe.

Death hunter: Undertaker.

Dimber damber: Guildmaster.

Ding boy: Mugger.

Dive: Hideout. Also *stalling ken*, *stop hole abbey*.

Diving: Picking pockets.

Dommerer: Beggar.

Drag: Follow.

Dress up: Tie up.

Earnest: Promise to pay.

Equipt: Rich. Also *oak*.

Fams: Gloves.

Fang: Dog.

Fence: Sell stolen goods.

Flag waving: Planning.

Flash: Magic. ("Flash" is traditionally used for the work of thieves, but in many fantasy settings, it has been adapted to mean magic instead.)

Flash cove: Male wizard.

Flash mot: Female wizard.

Flogger: Member of the watch. Also *bus napper*, *catch pole*, *fool finder*, *grunter*, *lurcher*, *pig*, *tapper*, *trap*.

Footpad: A common thief.

Galoot: Mercenary soldier.

Game: Theft.

Glim: Lantern.

Grifter: A con artist.

Gudgeon: A gullible person.

Guest house: Prison. Also *porridge*, *pound*, *quod*, *sheriff's hotel*.

Hack: Hired help.

Harmans: The stocks.

Have tea with the pigs: Be tortured.

High and low men: Loaded dice.

High pad: Highwayman. Also *knight of the road*, *land pirate*.

His Honor's guest: Prisoner. Also *jailbird*.

Hit-Man/Hitter: Assassin.

Hoodwink: Con or lie. Also *amuse*, *fob*, *fun*, *sham*.

Hole in need of plugging: Informant. Also *rat*.

Jack in a box: A cardsharp, cheat, or con artist.

Jack nasty face: A common sailor.

Jem: Ring. Also *onion*.

Jemmy: Crowbar.

Jigger: Whipping post.

Joke: Lock.

Jordain: Staff.

Jukrum: License; specifically, permission to operate within the territory of a thieves' guild.

Ken: House. Also *panny*.

Ken cracker: Housebreaker. Also *cracksman*, *rusher*.
Kurbe: Gnome.
Lark: Fun.
Lay: Danger.
Lid: Door.
Light bob: Low-ranking soldier.
Lightmans: Day.
Lone wolf: A thief not attached to a guild.
Low tide: No coin in a pocket.
Mark: Target of a con or crime. Also *pigeon*.
Milch cow: Fool. Also *gudgeon*, *gull*.
Mistis: Halfling.
Moon pigs: Night watchmen.
Morning drop: Gallows. Also *chatts*, *deadly nevergreen*, *nubbing cheat*, *three-legged mare*.
Moss: Lead (the metal).
Mot: Woman. Also *moll*, *mort*.
Natty lad: Street urchin.
Nimgimmer: Healer.
Nob: Head.
Nabbed: Arrested. Also *invited*.
Nick: Steal. Also *bite*, *borrow*, *cloy*, *filch*, *heave*, *hoist*, *lift*, *make*, *snaffle*.
Nubbed: Hanged. Also *acorned*, *dangled*, *had a case of hempen fever*, *scragged*, *stretched*, *swung*.
Nubbing cove: Hangman. Also *ketch*, *topping cove*.
Oak/Oaken towel: A wooden cudgel.
Obla: Half.
Pad: Highway.
Pair of eyes: Lookout.
Pig poker: Dagger.
Pop: Pawn. Also *vamp*.
Pop shop: Pawnbroker.
Prancer: Horse. Also *keffal*.
Prig napper: A bounty hunter.
Punchline: Lock pick. Also *dub*.
Rap: False oath.
Rattler: Coach. Also *rumble-tumble*.
Rattling mumper: Beggar who targets coaches.
Reader: Purse. Also *bung*, *dummee*.
Recruiting service: Robbery.
Repository: City or town jail.
Resurrection men: Body snatchers.
Roller: Watchman on patrol.
Rootin': Committing crimes.
Rounder: Burglar.
Screw: Skeleton key.
Setter: Watchman on guard duty.
Shoulder clapper: High-ranking member of the watch.
Shoulder tap: Backstab.
Signals: Plan.
Sing: Inform. Also *cackle*, *peach*, *rat*.

SAY WHAT? . . .

If you want to use thieves' cant less as a collection of individual slang terms and more as a form of jargon or double-talk that attaches a secret meaning to particular expressions, here are a handful of sayings, insults, and other useful turns of phrase.

Babes in the woods: Criminals in the stocks.
Born under a half-copper planet, never to be worth a gold: A person who is remarkably unsuccessful at anything he attempts.
A buck of the first head: A person whose debauchery exceeds that of his fellows.
Child's best guide to the gallows: A pack of playing cards.
Death's head upon a mop-stick: A miserable, emaciated person.
Dowse on the chops: A blow to the face.
Drawing the king's picture: Forging coins.
Go by the ground: A short person; also used for halflings.
Handsome reward: A horsewhipping.
Higgledy-piggledy: Completely mixed up.
King's Head Inn: The prison in the king's city.
Knight of the trencher: A great eater.
Knowledge box: Head.
Laid on the shelf: Pawned.
Left at sixes and sevens: In a state of disarray.
Little alderman: A thief's tool, made of a simple wedge of steel.
Looking as if one could not help it: Playing dumb.
Napper of naps: A sheep stealer.
O Be Joyful: A threat, meaning "I'll give you something to cry about."
Odd-come-shortly: Sometime or another.
Outrun the constable: Live beyond one's means.
Pothooks and hangers: Extremely poor handwriting.
Quacking cheat: A duck.
Quick and nimble: (Sarcastic) More like a bear than a squirrel.
Quirks and quillets: Tricks and devices.
Shall have a swimmer: Plan to escape by boat before an execution date.
Sheriff's picture frame: The gallows.
Shut the potato trap: Be quiet.
Snap the glaze: Break the windows of a shop.
Sorrow shall be his sops: He'll regret this.
Tip your lour or I'll mill ye: Give me money or I'll beat you.
Walking up against the wall: Running up a tab in a tavern.
Windmills in the head: Foolish projects.

Smooth: Quiet, without trouble.
Sneak: Thief. Also *blue pigeon*, *bubber*, *bufe napper*, *canter*, *filcher*, *old hand*, *prig*, *rover*, *whip jack*.
Soul doctor: Cleric. Also *pater cove*, *pudding sleeves*, *tickle text*.
Swag: Loot or treasure. Also *score*.
Tak: Orc.
Takobla: Half-orc.
Teko: Dwarf.
Telling a joke: Lockpicking.
Tilted floor: Wall.
Tip: Pay someone not to beat you up.
Tithe: Dues owed to the guild.
Tuck in bed: Knock unconscious.
Tumbler: Wagon or cart. Also *fly*, *vardo*.
Ulim: Elf or eladrin.
Ulimobla: Half-elf.
Visiting the neighborhood: Committing a burglary.
Wet work: Murder. Also *hush*.
Yarn: Story.
Yellow tin: Gold.
Young nipper: Cutpurse.

About the Author

Alana Joli Abbott has written several adventure scenarios for RPGA campaigns, from *Living Kingdoms of Kalamar* to *Xen'drik Expeditions* and *Living* FORGOTTEN REALMS, as well as fiction, comics, and history articles. When not rewriting Greek or Norse mythology in her home games, she blogs about writing and mythology on her home page at www.VirgilandBeatrice.com.

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Rolling in the 'Deep

By Shelly Mazzanoble

Illustration by William O'Connor

You don't know my friend Roxy personally (most of you don't, anyway), but I've mentioned her in this column before. She's married to a gamer (and fellow Wizard employee), loves *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *Battlestar Galactica*, but won't touch D&D with a *Staff of the Magi*. Why? Because she "doesn't like fantasy."

"But you know Harry Potter isn't real, right?" I said one of 5,923 times we've had this conversation. "It's *fantasy*."

"Bite your tongue," she sneered.

"In D&D," I have explained multiple times, "You could essentially *be* Harry Potter."

"Nope," she would always say. "I don't like acting. And I don't do accents."

Ah, the stereotypes. Will they ever go away?

"You don't have to do accents," I said. Again. "You just sit there and talk. Like normal. I just think it's weird that given your predilection for fantasy, you won't even try D&D."

"Well I think *you're* weird," she countered. Ha! Like I haven't heard that before. "You love a game like D&D, and yet you haven't even seen the entire *Lord of the Rings* trilogy."

Gasp. Okay, there it is. My dirty little secret. It's not that I don't like the *Lord of the Rings* movies. I loved the first one. I just haven't gotten around to seeing the other two. So, maybe she had a point. Having a penchant for one fantastical thing doesn't necessarily ensure you'll gravitate to *all* things fantasy.

But still . . . this is D&D! If you've ever dreamed of being *anything*—an astronaut, a dolphin trainer, Joan Crawford—you'll probably find something to like about it.

I refuse to give up on Roxy appreciating the hobby I have come to love. She's *exactly* the type of woman I wrote *Confessions of a Part-Time Sorceress* for. In fact, she was one of the women I "duped" into playing D&D when I had them over for dinner. While none of my girlfriends took to D&D, they at least said they had fun bumbling their way through the rules and forgave me for misleading them into believing I meant "dinner and drinks" when I invited them over.

Roxy, however, has never let her guard down since.

"I *think* we're free," she always starts with when I extend a dinner invitation to her and Paolo. "What should we bring?"

"Dice," I'll say. "Pencils. Maybe your favorite chainmail bikini in case we want to go in the hot tub."

"That's not funny."

But it is funny. I mean, we don't even have a hot tub.

I can't help thinking, if only I could find another way to reintroduce her to D&D.

✦✦✦

"Are you familiar with Euro-style board games?" Rodney asked, as he was setting up the components to demo *Lords of Waterdeep* for Bart, my boss, and myself.

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"Like *Pays des Bonbons*?" I asked. "That's how you say 'Candy Land' in French."

"Not really," Rodney said.

"No, really! I Googled it once for a story I was working on in college. Stayed with me for some reason."

Rodney explained what he really meant by "Euro-style" board game, the category *Lords of Waterdeep* falls into. Clear winner, no player elimination, and wooden pieces (really?) all are characteristics. We helped Rodney punch out little pieces of gold and victory points while he shuffled the Quest and Intrigue cards. I believe the more components a game has, the more difficult it is to learn. I sincerely hoped I was wrong, because Rodney is a very nice guy and I'd hate to get all ADHD and yawny playing a game he designed.

Rodney doled out Gold and player mats and started explaining the rules. Uh-oh. I could feel myself drifting off. There appeared to be a lot of rules. And strategy. And this game board looked pretty intricate. What did he just say about *Intrigue cards*? Where was my Agent pool? How long had I scheduled this meeting for?

All right, long story short, I loved it. Maybe I *do* fancy Euro-style board games. Maybe I'm a secret strategist. Maybe, just maybe, there is a competitive, Agent-acquiring, resource-managing machine lurking quietly under my exfoliated and vanilla-scented epidermis. Whatever it was, I couldn't wait to play again. And I knew just who I was going to play it with.

When our product samples came in, I practically bum rushed Chris Lindsay to get to mine.

"It's *Lords of Waterdeep*," he said, holding me at arm's length. "Not a cheesecake."

"I know what it is!" I reached for the box. To an average outsider, *Lords of Waterdeep* doesn't look like the typical expression of D&D. There's no dice, no painted miniatures. Heck, there's not even a dungeon or a dragon. And because it has the word "Lord" in the title, I could maybe convince Roxy it had something to do with our new TV obsession, *Downton Abbey*, if she showed any resistance. I sent off a hurried email to invite her and Paolo over for dinner that Friday.

After a meal consisting of lasagna, fig and goat cheese salad, and angel food cake trifle, Roxy, Paolo, Bart, and his friend Sean joined me for a nondescript, perfectly friendly board game.

"Is that Seattle?" Roxy asked when Bart spread the game board on the table.

"No, it's Waterdeep," I answered.

"Seattle's sister city in the *Forgotten Realms*," Paolo said.

I shot him a *zip it* look but then remembered the "Forgotten Realms" meant as much to Roxy as "Mordenkainen" did. When Bart began explaining the rules, I saw Roxy's eyes glaze over. This was probably the same look Rodney saw on my face, too, so I didn't panic. Yet.

"This game isn't even released yet," I told them, hoping they might be impressed by the exclusiveness.

She wasn't. But Sean was.

"Awesome!" Sean said. "I feel like a hipster teenager in the West Village."

Roxy choose to be yellow—the Knights.

"Can I be Knights Templar?" she asked.

"Of course," I told her. If she wanted to be David Hasselhoff in *Knight Rider* I would have let her.

Sean, who just had a bid on a short sale rejected after four and a half months of waiting, was immediately drawn to the Builder's Hall section of the game board. If you have Agents assigned here, and enough Gold, you can purchase Buildings that will afford you and other players benefits in the game.

"Oh sure," he moaned. "It's all about the money. Again the 99% win!"

I was sincerely hoping this wasn't a bad idea all around.

He went first and acquired three Adventurers, represented by small wooden blocks.

"Fighters," he mused. "Always good to have on your team."

Bart went next and immediately plunked down enough Gold to purchase The Yawning Portal.

"I'd like to send my Fighters to your tavern to stage a coup," Sean said. "I want a tavern."

Clearly he was projecting. Missing out on that lakeside home was hurting him more than he let on.

"It doesn't work that way," Bart explained. "But you're welcome to come visit my tavern. Happy Hour all day."

Paolo, who is color blind, went next. "I'll take these yellow dudes," he said, swiping three blue cubes from the stash. Roxy quietly replaced them with the correct colors.

Once we all took a turn putting an Agent into action, Roxy asked for more Gold.

"I thought it was like *Monopoly*," she said. "Pass Go and get two hundred pieces of Gold."

"You haven't even spent the Gold you have," Paolo noted. "Why do you need more?"

"I'm a saver," she said, withholding any additional information.

When her turn rolled around again, I casually suggested she might try to buy a Building, as there were a few good candidates in Builder's Hall. Instead she placed an Agent in Aurora's Realms Shop and acquired four more Gold. Maybe she did have a strategy.

Sean had a strategy now—to buy as many Buildings as he could.

"These are just rebound Buildings, you know," I said. "Sure, you're happy now, but they're not going to make you feel better in the long run."

"Not true," he said. "I sincerely care about these Buildings."

"Umm . . ." Bart whispered to me. "Please accept his offer."

Halfway through the game everyone had at least one Building on the board except Roxy. She was still hoarding her Gold and going on the occasional Quest. Victory Points didn't motivate her, just cold, hard cash.

When she was stumped on where to send her last Agent, I called out to her. "Hey, lady. You and all that Gold are welcome to check out this lovely House of Good Spirits. We offer free wi-fi and a continental breakfast in the morning."

If she landed on my Building, I could get the Fighter I desperately needed to complete a Quest worth 25 Victory Points.

"Or you could come to the New Olamn," Bart said, courting her. "It's new, as the name implies. And we are situated on a cat sanctuary that you are free to roam during your stay."

"Ohh," she purred, immediately dropping her Agent on Bart's Building. "That sounds lovely!"

"You are slime," I whispered to him. "Well played, though."

On Sean's next turn he played an Intrigue card that netted him two Clerics and one other player a highly sought-after Wizard. Looking at the Quest cards in front of everyone, it was obvious we could all benefit from Sean's random act of kindness. We fought over that little, purple cube like cast members on *Survivor* fight over immunity. Even Paolo got into it, until Roxy gently pointed out that he didn't need purple.

"It's green," he said. "Isn't it?"

But a delicious home-cooked meal couldn't win me any favor with Sean. He gave the extra Wizard to Bart.

To retaliate, I gave Bart my Intrigue card, which made him complete a pretty tedious, yet mandatory Quest for low reward.

"Wow," he said. "Really?"

He threatened to lock me in the bedroom, which had essentially become a giant Dutch oven thanks to Sadie, our digestively challenged dog, spending the last four hours in there with a giant bar-b-que pig ear.

In a move that surprised us all, Roxy finally caved and bought a Building. Only it wasn't just any old Building. It was one we all coveted—The Stone House, which granted one Gold piece for every Building in play. There were currently nine Buildings in play. Everyone wanted to get to Roxy's house first. Did I mention only one Agent per round could reside on a Building?

While she was busy collecting Gold, I was doing just the opposite—spending it all willy-nilly. I was so focused on gathering Adventurers for Quests, I forgot to save my money. What am I, in my twenties again?

As we moved past the midpoint of the game, we all had our missions. Some needed more Quests, some needed Agents, but most of us needed Gold to do anything. All of us but Roxy, of course, who was having a hard time keeping her cardboard currency from overflowing into Paolo's game space. And then in her second most startling move of the night, she moved her final Agent of the round to Aurora's Realms Shop and didn't just add four more Gold pieces to her pile, but ensured that if anyone was getting any Gold during this round, we were getting it from *her* Building.

"Damn," Sean muttered. "The rich keep getting richer."

✦✦✦

We were running out of rounds, which meant it was Quest time (it's the best way to get massive Victory Points). I kept my eye out for arcane and warfare Quests, because my Lord would give me extra points for those, but at this point I'd do whatever got my scoring token moving around the board.

As people frantically tried to complete Quests, acquire Agents, and rack up Gold, the game concluded with us practically breathing heavily.

"Whew," Sean said. "That was intense!"

There was a difference of twelve Victory Points between first and fourth place, but that was subject to change as we tallied the additional Victory Points we got for things like completed Quests, Gold, and remaining Adventurers.

It was down to the wire, but Bart ended up winning. I came in third. Roxy came in last. You only get one Victory Point for every two Gold pieces.

"That's B.S." she said. "Gold is worth at least double. Tell your R&D department to change that."

Coming in last probably doesn't help your impression of a new game, but still, I had to ask what she thought of it.

"It was fine," she said.

'Fine'?! *Fine* is how I might describe a project at work that I was dreading, or a date with a serial killer who didn't end up murdering me.

"I mean, a timer might be nice," she continued. "I don't think you should be able to spend five minutes deciding what to do on your turn. That's what other people's turns are for. Keep it moving."

She also thought the Knight pieces should look more "knighty."

"They just look like A's," she said. "I can't really relate to an A."

Finally I asked the question that mattered the most. Wait until she found out!

"Did you know you just played *Dungeons & Dragons*?"

Nonchalantly she said, "Yeah."

What? Impossible! No one mentioned anything about D&D!

"But how?" I asked.

"There's a huge D&D logo right there on the board."

Oh. Weird, how I missed that.

Roxy left that night with a Chinese take-out container full of trifle but no desire to roll up a D&D character. More important, she's still talking to me.

I was about to write the whole thing off as a failure, figuring some people just aren't cut out for D&D, when I got an email from her.

Just wanted to thank you again for dinner. If I have to say, the game was fun—now that I know, I won't hoard gold, I'll buy property. I know Paolo loved it so maybe I'll play it again. Perhaps next weekend if you guys want to come to our house for dinner?

I don't think there are enough Victory Points for that kind of win.

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble has played *Lords of Waterdeep* eight times since she wrote this column. None of them have been with Roxy. Yet.

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FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Ed Greenwood's Eye on the Realms

The Merendil Gold

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Ben Wootten

Centuries ago, the Merendil family was exiled from Cormyr for attempted regicide, their lands and wealth seized by the Crown. For years afterward, daring bands repeatedly tried to force entry into particular royal buildings and remote keeps, their leaders vanishing—probably teleported away—whenever they were thwarted. Legends arose that they sought "the Merendil gold" that the exiles left behind when they were hounded from the realm. Rumors claim that the Merendils hid this vast fortune in various places in Cormyr. When they looked into this matter, not even the War Wizards could find any riches, however. Now, the attempts to plunder those particular buildings have suddenly begun again. . . .

The Treachery of House Merendil

Cormyreans today remember House Merendil as the epitome of deceitfully smiling, evil, manipulative, and ruthless wealthy nobility. This reputation came about largely thanks to the sly treachery and consummate acting skills of Lady Ryndala Merendil, the then-matriarch of the family, who in 376 DR tried to have Crown Prince Azoun Obarskyr (later the first "King Azoun" of Cormyr) slain.

Amedahast, who in later years became the second High Wizard of Cormyr, played a large part in foiling Lady Merendil's assassination plot.[1] Soon thereafter, she was too busy protecting Azoun during his war against the forces of Valashar to deal with the exiled Merendils, who fled to Westgate, then scattered to Amn, Sembia, Tethyr, and many Sword Coast cities. After that, many of the younger members of the Merendil family took other names and married into noble families of lands distant from Cormyr.

Centuries later, Lady Ryndala Merendil became a ghazneth,[2] one of the fell magical creatures that imperiled Cormyr. By then her descendants had flourished in many places in the Realms, sharing some general traits: sharp wits, financial success, a dislike for too high a public profile, a ruthlessness in dealing with any who crossed them or stood in their way—and a distaste for the ruling family of Cormyr, House Obarskyr. For most of the Merendils, the dislike translated into a shunning of the Forest Kingdom in general.

The Legend of the Gold

Occasionally, after the time of Azoun I, bands of mercenaries hired in various Inner Sea ports or in Amn,

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by men using false names and having much coin to distribute, traveled to Cormyr posing as merchants. In a few cases, they passed themselves off as would-be Moonsea miners and loggers, or pilgrims "passing through" the Forest Kingdom. When in Cormyr, they assembled at agreed-upon locales, where they met up with those who had hired them. These hiring leaders provided their forces with armor and weapons, then led them on covert night assaults on Crown-owned buildings in remote keeps in the backlands and borders of Cormyr, as well as other areas throughout the kingdom.

Most of these assaults failed, none of them uncovered any gold, and none of the survivors from among the hired mercenaries could tell Cormyr's War Wizards anything more than that their missions were to protect their leaders as the leaders sought to reach specific rooms (known beforehand only to the leaders) in those buildings. The interrogating Wizards of War are all certain that their spells would have uncovered any deceit, or at least evidence of magical compulsions not to reveal information or magically destroyed memories. They found none such, and they are confident the survivors truly didn't know what their leaders sought. No leader has ever been taken alive—or, as far as is known, taken at all; whenever a mission started to go bad, the leaders vanished, teleporting away.

By about 500 DR, belief had taken firm root in Cormyr that these raids (always the subject of much gossip and speculation throughout the realm) were the work of House Merendil. Some felt that these attempts were efforts to recover hidden "family gold" that Merendil had to abandon when exiled, but that had not immediately fallen into the hands of the Crown. Tales say that gold was somehow hidden—sometimes in clever or strange ways. Some theorized that the gold was melted and poured into a thin (or thick!) layer over roofs that then received new tiles over the top of the gold to hide it. Other rumors state that the gold had been poured down inside hollow walls or used to entirely fill existing secret passages. The strangest tale mentions that ambitious soon-to-be-exiles poured gold down garderobes to fill them. In this tale, the gold starts from closed cesspool lids and extends four floors above into privies that were then walled off and concealed in renovations!

Other rumors insisted that "the Merendil gold" was a misnomer, and that the Merendils were really trying to recover powerful magic items, such as family heirlooms too large to carry off into exile, or for that matter to be carried anywhere, by anyone. Any courtier or War Wizard who has examined the records of the day, who has been privy to the investigations of more recent raids, or who has knowledge of the exhaustive searches conducted in Vangerdahast's early tenure, can attest to the fact that nothing magical has ever been found in any of the buildings these raiders strike, beyond the usual preservative castings and wardings, and a few old glowstones (enchanted light sources). If any of these raiders were seeking magic, it was gone before they got there.

Some sages have proposed theories suggesting that these raids were tests of Cormyr's readiness against swift, small-force invasions or strategic strikes, or a means of taunting or unsettling the Obarskyrs. Most courtiers, nobility, sages, and War Wizards alike dismiss such speculations by referencing the timing of some of the raids, and the locations of others. If any humiliation, military evaluation, or discomfiting of royalty was intended, they argue, some curious times and places were chosen for many of the raids.

Nonetheless, popular "common knowledge" lore in Cormyr is that "the Merendils still hunt their gold" in the realm, by means of small bands of ruthless people striking suddenly in the dark—and that they've done so for centuries, and that they'll go on doing so until they finally "get it all."

Some Truths and Some Mysteries

When in conversation with certain courtiers, sages, and heralds, Royal Magician Caladnei let slip some interesting words in her later years (deliberately, most who knew her assume). Some of these words shed light on a good number of the raids, revealing that they had nothing to do with the Merendils at all. Some might have been cultists who sought to seize or steal specific items—for example, "a sword that has shed blood in battle, while wielded by a Purple Dragon of Cormyr"—to use in rites. Another reason might involve sellswords hired by treacherous nobles to eliminate witnesses or others who might betray them to the Crown. These hired killers then "covered" the murders up by passing them off as casualties among defenders in a raided location. The raids might also have been examples of infighting among cabals of rival nobles or merchants or secret societies, who eliminate rivals when they can pass off such murders as "an unfortunate consequence of a Merendil gold raid."

None of this means that raids mounted by House Merendil (through intermediaries) don't still occur. According to some current Highknights of the realm, they do. Current Cormyrean intelligence has identified some of the sponsors of recent raids, but it has narrowed down only possible aims or targets of raids, not specifically identified what the leaders of such raids are after.

Some of those sponsors (all of whom have Merendil blood) are: the sallow, drawling, sly, and urbane investor and importer Drost Haellandlyth of Saerloon (and formerly of Westgate); the ruthless poisoner and accomplished swordsman (and "tutor of the blade to the wealthy") Ilmur Guldurgran of Athkatla; and Saerathra Merendil, a purring, jet-black-haired seductress (reputed to be immune to many poisons) who has wooed, married, and buried

no less than eleven wealthy husbands, and is working on a twelfth.[3]

Reports and Family Lore

Merendil family lore insists that the Merendils, in the early days of Cormyr, met a dragon and made a pact with it. The dragon—of a type unrecorded in the family tales—was very old, increasingly feeble, and a great wizard in its own right. In return for augmenting its hoard greatly, as well as guarding that hoard from discovery and theft as the Crown sent parties to explore and map every corner of the realm, the dragon gave to the Merendils vials of its own blood that it had enchanted. According to the lore, the vials and their contents are (magically, somehow) invisible to most magic-detecting spells known to humans. Additionally, if a vial is imbibed by anyone, the enspelled dragon blood supposedly makes the person physically stronger and as vigorous as a hot-blooded youth, while at the same time extending his or her life span in this augmented state for decades. Further, after the dragon blood effects wear off, an imbiber collapses, withers, and dies swiftly unless he or she can find another vial or other magical means of prolonging life.

Family lore also states that some Merendils have drunk of this dragon blood and have lived very long and vigorous lives. Alathea Merendil, a spiteful hedonist who spent most of her days seducing the wealthy of Athkatla, apparently flourished for almost three centuries before literally shriveling and dying in the arms of a shocked young husband (her forty-third, some Merendils say, though he was unaware of his many predecessors).

Some members of the family also believe that the dragon lives on in the minds of Merendils who have drunk of its blood. It whispers what it knows to them in their heads, or influences or outright controls them for short periods when it wants to. This is given as a justification for the odd pursuits and deeds of certain family members: They are doing the dragon's bidding for some mysterious end. Other Merendils dismiss this as superstitious rumor that is sometimes deliberately fomented by those desiring to evade responsibility for their own actions.

That's the extent of what a Wizard of War, one Jallask Downtlurk, reported, but other War Wizards have since written comments to accompany his report. One of them, Talannath Turward, has visited Waterdeep undercover a time or six, and his comment reads: "Interestingly, there is a Dratha Murrndryl dwelling in Castle Ward, making a living as a 'daily lifeguide' seer to bored highborn and wealthy ladies. At least three Palace officials have told me she once worked as a lady escort to envoys and courtiers, and in those days she called herself Andurlatha Merendil. She has two sons, the elder named Dragonard Merendil and the younger named Trueblood Merendil. Rather a long string to be mere coincidence, yes?"

An older report, from Mountarn Harrowsar, a now-dead War Wizard who served under Vangerdahast, says that Braeskur Hammerlath, a long-deceased "common merchant" of great wealth and known Merendil heritage, who dwelt in Tashluta but shipped many goods to merchants in eastern Cormyr all his life, was once spied upon by a servant. This fellow observed Hammerlath kneeling and praying before a statuette of a dragon, using the words, "Oraundalaghhaumtalattor,[4] Friend of All Merendils, grant me success!"

And finally, there is this comment from a current Highknight using only the cover name[5] of Bowsar: "In the Wizard's Reach I came across sinister men reputed in Aglarond to have bested Thayan mages in spell-battle, who were known as the Servants of Oraunntar. Apparently Oraunntar is 'a dragon who glides unseen, but whispers in minds.' Can this be where the wyrm Oraunn of the Thunder Peaks has gotten to? Interestingly, I heard from several traders that a dark-haired, dark-eyed man who wore the robes of a wizard and bore an ornate staff, now gone from the Reach, recently scoured the most desolate stands of trees on the uninhabited islets of this region for some unknown-to-them thing. He gave his name as Luskurl Merendil—and told them to make sure they repeated it to any Cormyrean they met."

A current high-ranking Wizard of War whose name has not been shared apparently added, under Bowsar's words: "Clearly, an unresolved problem awaits us here. Recommend action be taken."

Right now, that action—and any reaction—lies ahead of us all.

Notes

1. See *Cormyr: A Novel* by Ed Greenwood and Jeff Grubb (TSR, 1996).

2. See the novels *Beyond the High Road* by Troy Denning (TSR, 1999), and *Death of the Dragon* by Troy Denning and Ed Greenwood (TSR, 2000).

3. Saerathra's hobbies include hiring mages to temporarily shapechange her so she can experience life as a serpent, a spider, or a falcon. She recently conversed with one such wizard who later sold what he heard to a War Wizard before fleeing the continent of Faerûn and permanently changing his name and habitual shape. That Wizard of War (Jallask Downtlurk, formerly of Marsember) wrote a report that, although still secret, has apparently been perused—or at least discussed—by many current courtiers.

4. The sage Dwalish of Athkatla, whose specialty is dragonkind and all things draconic, says that a white-hued dragon named "Oraundalaghhaumtalattor" is reported to have laired in the Thunder Peaks, with the first dated human sighting being 176 DR (though many earlier elven records exist that tell of this dragon). It was last seen in the region in 1226 DR.

Dwalish stresses two things: that a lack of sightings does *not* mean Oraundalaghhaumtalattor is dead, and that "white-hued" means just that: the dragon has (or had) a white hide but might not be of the species commonly known as "white dragons." Similarly the Purple Dragon that Cormyr takes its main heraldic emblem from, Thauglor, was not a "purple" species, but a black dragon whose hide changed hue because of its great age. For much of its life, Oraundalaghhaumtalattor was popularly known as "Oraunn," a name it liked and encouraged the use of.

5. Highknights of Cormyr use "cover names" (an older term for this was "shield names") when still undercover on missions, particularly when this service keeps them outside Cormyr for lengthy periods. Unlike other realms (such as Amn, Sembia, and Tethyr), Cormyr does not encourage the re-use of cover names by a sequence of agents down the years.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.

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DARK SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun

The Black Blade of Raam

By Rodney Thompson

Illustration by Kieran Yanner

Despite the best efforts of the sorcerer-kings to oppress their subjects, on rare occasions individuals gain enough power and prestige to become nuisances to those despots. Sometimes, however, those who rise in status independent of the sorcerer-kings are not rebellious freedom fighters or challengers of authority, but instead agents of chaos who lash out at targets both virtuous and vile. The Black Blade is one such individual, a powerful assassin in Raam who serves neither Abalach-Re nor any of the other power bases in the city.

Many would call the Black Blade of Raam a vigilante, but that word implies some kind of dedication to targeting evil. The Black Blade is simply a killer; his targets are those who rise to a high level of influence within the city-state. His true identity is a mystery, and he shows up to do his murderous work only once every few months or so. In many ways, tales of the Black Blade seem like stories that mothers tell their children at night to convince them to be good. Yet the black-clad assassin is all too real; though the common folk and the slaves of Raam need not fear him, many others of higher station in the city constantly look over their shoulders for signs of pursuit.

The Black Blade first appeared within the last decade. His first few killings were initially written off as random murders, and several months passed before a pattern was discerned and the assassin's reputation took shape. At first, the templars of Raam made a big show of their efforts to capture the Black Blade, dispatching half-giant squads throughout the city to capture or kill him before he could strike again. When weeks became months and no further assassinations had occurred, Abalach-Re issued a proclamation declaring that the Black Blade had been driven out of the city, and she congratulated her templars on their excellent work.

Only then did the Black Blade strike once more, becoming an even more visible threat. No longer did his assassinations take place when no one was

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looking; instead, the Black Blade began to kill in public, or in front of witnesses, making sure that the survivors knew who was responsible. Yet no one in Raam has managed to identify the assassin, and he has stymied every subsequent attempt by Abalach-Re and her templars to stop the killings.

Targets

At first blush, it would seem that the assassin chooses his targets randomly. Not much connects the victims, though some evidence does suggest that the Black Blade is not merely some serial killer loose in the city, but rather a dedicated professional. The one thing that the targets have in common is a rapid rise in status; each had recently attained some elevated level of popularity or political influence. Beyond that observation, however, little explains why a target was chosen. Not everyone who achieves some improved stature is slain by the Black Blade of Raam, but the assassin chooses his victims exclusively from that group.

The Black Blade has killed powerful templars, leaders of the Veiled Alliance, nobles and masters of the Way, leaders of the merchant houses, influential visitors from other city-states, slave-tribe infiltrators and insurgent leaders, and even gladiators who have achieved some notoriety. The only powerful inhabitant of Raam who seemingly has no fear of the Black Blade is Abalach-Re. Some in the city speculate that the assassin acts at the sorcerer-queen's behest, but that thought is quickly countered—if she needed someone dead, she would do it by her own hand, as she has many times before.

Perhaps speaking to his motives, the Black Blade of Raam seems to choose targets in order to sow maximum chaos. Just when a figure rises to prominence and organizes some kind of power base, he or she is cut down. Riots have been sparked by many of these assassinations, and roving bands of vigilantes (some dispatched by the templars, and some by other powerful groups) have broken down doors and invaded homes searching for the Black Blade. When the assassin strikes, Raam is filled with recriminations and retribution for weeks afterward, a state of unrest that makes life harder on everyone.

The Black Blade of Raam — **Level 14 Elite Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid, human — XP 2,000

HP 220; **Bloodied** 110 — **Initiative** +17
AC 28, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 25 — **Perception** +16
Speed 8
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Unstoppable
The Black Blade makes saving throws at the start and the end of his turn. He can make a saving throw to end any dazing, dominating, or stunning effect on him, including those that a save cannot normally end.

Weapon Switch
Whenever the Black Blade takes a standard action, he can stow an object and draw an object as a free action.

Standard Actions

Kukri (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 15 damage.

Longbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 3d10 + 6 damage.

Execution (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** when the Black Blade uses *clear the area*
Requirement: The Black Blade must be wielding a kukri.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature granting combat advantage to the Black Blade); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 6d6 + 13 damage, plus 7d8 extra damage if the target has none of its allies adjacent to it.

Clear the Area (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** when the Black Blade uses *cloud of smoke*
Requirement: The Black Blade must be wielding a longbow.
Attack: Ranged 5 (one, two or three creatures); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 3d10 + 6 damage, the Black Blade pushes the target up to 4 squares, and the target is immobilized until the end of the Black Blade's next turn.
Effect: The Black Blade chooses one enemy he did not target with this power. That enemy grants combat advantage to him until the end of his next turn.

Cloud of Smoke (zone) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The Black Blade uses a smoke bomb in a close burst 2. The burst creates a zone that lasts until the start of his next turn. The zone is totally obscured, and any creature other than the Black Blade that enters the zone or starts its turn there is dazed (save ends).

Move Actions

Tactical Maneuver ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Effect: The Black Blade shifts up to his speed.

Skills Acrobatics +18, Athletics +14, Dungeoneering +16, Stealth +18, Thievery +18

Str 14 (+9)	**Dex** 23 (+13)	**Wis** 19 (+11)
Con 20 (+12)	**Int** 17 (+10)	**Cha** 9 (+6)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, kukri, longbow, 20 arrows, 5 smoke bombs

The Warning Shot

Ever since the Black Blade began to ply his trade in the open, he has displayed a tactic that quickly became known as a sort of calling card in advance. An assassination is always preceded, days ahead of time, by a literal warning shot—an alchemical arrow fired near the target that burns with bright purple fire, screams with a loud whine, and leaves a coiling trail of purple smoke in its wake. (This arrow is the one instance of magic that the Black Blade is known to employ; the assassin's methods otherwise show no hint of arcane power.) The arrow always lands near the intended victim, but tracing the smoke trail back to its point of origin reveals no sign of the shooter. After firing this warning shot, the Black Blade waits at least three days before striking, sometimes as long as a week. When the time comes, the assassination always succeeds, despite all preparations. No one has ever escaped the Black Blade's wrath.

FOR THE DM: USING THE BLACK BLADE

The Black Blade of Raam is primarily intended as an antagonist to drive adventures in the city-state of Raam. The assassin makes a great X factor to drop into an existing campaign, sowing doubt and confusion among both the heroes and their enemies. You can also spin a great adventure around a confrontation with the assassin.

One way to create such a showdown requires foreshadowing the conflict a few sessions in advance. Start by dropping the assassin's name in conversations with inhabitants of Raam: Perhaps a shopkeeper jokingly tells the adventurers to watch out for the Black Blade, or a thief describes a grisly murder as reminiscent of his handiwork. After the adventurers have gained a few levels, the Black Blade targets their patron (or one of their powerful allies), assassinating that person while the party is off on an adventure. Thrust into the chaos that grips the city following the murder, the heroes have little time to hunt down the killer. By the time the dust clears, they can find no sign of the Black Blade. After they undertake another adventure (perhaps one leading them away from, then back to, Raam), the Black Blade's warning shot gives notice that one of the adventurers is the next target. Instead of waiting for the assassin to strike, allow the heroes to discover the location of the Black Blade's hideout, giving them a chance to attack him.

The Blade's Safe House

Unbeknownst to the people of Raam, the Black Blade has a hideout in the city, a subterranean fortress where he can hole up for weeks or months. The entrance to this safe house is well hidden and protected by numerous traps, and no one has yet stumbled across it. Once inside, an ill-prepared intruder would not get far before being captured or slain by the fortress's various defenses. Though nonmagical, the traps in the safe house are elaborate, suggesting that their creator has an extensive knowledge of engineering and architecture.

The place is honeycombed with secret passages and access ways. The Black Blade of Raam knows that he is playing a dangerous game, and with no magical ability of his own he must rely upon his wits, foresight, and planning to keep enemies at bay. Anyone who managed to locate the safe house would be a major threat, and the assassin has taken pains to ensure that he can outmaneuver and slay any invader—or flee, if faced with an overwhelming force.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an advanced designer for Dungeons & Dragons® R&D at Wizards of the Coast, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the D&D® game include the *Dark Sun® Campaign Setting* and the *Dark Sun® Creature Catalog*™, *Monster Vault*™, *Player's Option: Heroes of the Feywild*™, and *Lords of Waterdeep*™.

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Eye on Eberron

The Chamber

By Keith Baker

Illustration by William O'Connor

Dragons. It's said that a single dragon can lay waste to an army. That dragons have forgotten more about magic than humanity will ever learn. Some even claim that the Sovereigns themselves were once dragons. If all that is true, then why are they watching me*?*

–Tora d'Lyrandar, speaking to her court-appointed Jorasco counselor

The Draconic Prophecy doesn't describe a single path for the future. Rather, it is a road map for all the paths that the future might take. Instead of saying, "A six-legged calf will be born in Varna," a typical segment of the Prophecy might state, "*If* Boran d'Vadalis builds a farm above the ruins of Shakaal *and* the calf is conceived when Eberron embraces Kythri, *then* a six-legged calf will be born in Varna." The future isn't set in stone, but part of it can be assured if the right dominos fall. For example, one path in the Prophecy leads to King Boranel's death by natural causes in 999 YK, while in another he faces Sora Maenya in battle in 1002 YK. The fragments that player characters encounter are just tiny pieces of the whole, and often they are still mutable, but at a certain point events are fixed. Much of the art of the diviner is in seeing enough of the whole to know what paths are yet in flux and what are locked in.

The dragon Ourelonastrix used the Prophecy to reveal ways to defeat rakshasa armies in the ancient war, and it showed the couatls the path they could take to bind the overlords and create the Silver Flame. Although it is a powerful tool even in its presently known state, pieces of the Prophecy are scattered across the world and the heavens, and new elements appear every day. The Lords of Dust, the Undying Court, and even the Twelve are working to manipulate it, but none are so skilled at this craft as the members of the Chamber.

Guardians of Destiny

The dragons of Argonnessen have studied the Prophecy for tens of thousands of years. Those early scholars rarely worked together, though. Greed and pride are powerful forces in a dragon's heart, and Prophecy marks and personal systems of interpreting signs are among the most valuable treasures in a hoard. Dragon sages engaged in prophetic duels,

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competing to see whose interpretation of events was more accurate. They conducted most of their studies from their homeland, sometimes using scrying and other forms of magic to examine distant signs—and at other times simply ignoring those that were out of easy reach. No force on Eberron could truly threaten Argonnessen, or so the dragons believed. As a result, they saw no need to hunt down every possible thread.

Two events derailed this train of thought. The first was the appearance of dragonmarks among the lesser races. The Prophecy had undergone a major evolution, and yet the dragons had been passed over. What did this mean? The second event was far more serious. In 298 YK the overlord Bel Shalor broke free from his prison and laid waste to Thrane before being bound once more by Tira Miron. The dragons who studied the event realized that the Lords of Dust had engineered Bel Shalor's release using their own knowledge of the Prophecy. The Draconic Prophecy no longer belonged to the dragons alone: Demons, deathless, and others were unlocking its secrets and exploiting them. The dragons knew more about the Prophecy than any other creatures in Eberron, but unless they started using that knowledge, they could lose the future.

Shapers and Preservers

The Chamber was established following the appearance of the dragonmarks, and its first task was to study their meaning. The Chamber quickly solidified its role when its reports led to the destruction of the line of Vol and of the Mark of Death. Since the release of Bel Shalor, pressure has been increasing on the Chamber to stop other forces from using the Prophecy as a weapon. However, it is not a monolithic organization. Although its members are united in the quest to discover as many threads of the Prophecy as possible, there are two major factions within the Chamber. The preservers believe that history should be allowed to take its own course, and that the Chamber should act only to prevent anyone from using knowledge of the Prophecy to determine the future. The shapers believe that the dragons need to take a proactive role in shaping the future.

These two factions in turn comprise many lesser cabals. Some shapers seek what is best for Argonnessen; others are concerned only with personal power. Although dragons of the Chamber are bound not to fight one another directly, preservers often interfere with shapers' plans, and any two shapers might have different plans for the future. The dragons unite against the Lords of Dust, the Undying Court, or others who engage in prophetic manipulation. Even then, a Chamber agent with a particularly long view of things might help a Lord of Dust achieve its goal, because this lesser victory is one of the dominos that has to fall for the dragon's goal to succeed.

Seekers of Vectors

Spies and agents of the Chamber are scattered across Khorvaire. Allies within the Chamber share safe houses and even secret identities. For example, "Sentinel Marshal Sorgan d'Deneith" is a persona used by six different dragons; as a marshal, Sorgan can show up anywhere in Karrnath and receive cooperation from local forces.

In some cases, these false faces belong to mortals who were killed so that the dragons could claim their identities; in others, the person is a willing participant in the masquerade. Some humanoid servant families have been working with draconic masters for generations. Family members rarely know the true nature of their patron, but they know it is a great being that has protected them from war and other misfortunes.

The dragons also make use of existing intelligence networks. Members of the Chamber hold influential positions in the Dark Lanterns, the Royal Eyes of Aundair, House Phiarlan, House Tharashk, and many more hierarchies.

All these spies and agents use their positions to find new Prophecy marks, monitor the activities of dragonmarked heirs, and most of all, identify and track vectors.

Vectors are the elements—living or inanimate—that play a role in a particular path of the Prophecy. Sometimes these elements are quite obvious; in the earlier example of the six-legged calf, Boran d'Vadalis is a vector. Typically, the Prophecy provides cryptic clues to vectors' identities instead of names. For example, a vector called "the Child of Six Storms" is probably a Lyrandar heir, perhaps one with six generations of dragonmarked parents. But he or she could also be a storm sorcerer whose powers emerge after being struck by lightning six times. The dragon attempting to follow this thread has to consider all possibilities.

Preservers fight to prevent outside forces from manipulating the vectors they are tracking, while shapers seek to control the vectors they identify. The challenge for the Chamber is that despite the dragons' individual and collective power, the nature of their work forces them to remain in the background. They are like gardeners: Whether they actively choose which flowers to grow or simply try to keep vermin out, the effort is ultimately about the flowers. The Chamber can only watch and tend. Each agent of the Chamber wants to make a particular story come to pass, but the vector cannot change. If a story is about Duke ir'Kesslan founding Q'barra, then Kesslan must complete that task: A dragon can guide him on the path to becoming king, but killing Kesslan and taking his place would only destroy that path. A dragon can help a hero find the tools he or she needs and provide information about the enemy, but if the path of the Prophecy depends on that hero winning a fight, he or she must win alone.

For the DM: Adventurers as Vectors

Adventurers, by their nature, are key to Eberron's unfolding destiny. Not every hero is vital to the Prophecy, but the player characters might be. If you, as Dungeon Master, want to make one or more player characters into vectors of the Prophecy, you should consider the following issues as you plan your campaign.

What Is the Timeline? What are the key events of the Prophecy, and when will they occur in the scope of your campaign? Will a player character free an overlord or defeat it? Does the character have a role to play in an event that is still far off? For example, the Prophecy might indicate that if the party's fighter and wizard have a child at the appropriate time, that child could grow up to defeat Bel Shalor. Of course, at the start of the campaign, the characters in question have only just met each other. What might cause romance to bloom?

Who Knows About It? In the example given above, the Lords of Dust who serve Bel Shalor would obviously want to kill either or both of the adventurers in question—or, failing that, at least prevent them from having a child. However, fragments of the Prophecy are scattered, so the demons are a direct threat only if they discover this part of the Prophecy and identify its vectors. At 1st level, the adventurers can't possibly take on rakshasas; their safety rests in the fact that the fiends don't yet know who they are. On the other hand, if the Chamber learns their identity and role, its agents will be trying to manipulate events surrounding them.

Who Wants What? Several factions might be working for different outcomes. Among the Chamber, shapers try to push vectors down certain paths, while preservers protect them from outside manipulation. In the example of the child, a shaper would work to create situations that could get the fighter and the wizard to fall in love, while a preserver would try to keep the Lords of Dust ignorant of that aspect of the Prophecy so that the adventurers can choose as they will. The Lords of Dust aren't a monolithic force either. Perhaps the defeat of Bel Shalor would pave the way for the release of the Voice in the Darkness—causing servants of one fiendish overlord to fight those of the other. Alternatively, Bel Shalor's minions might learn of another path in which the wizard and the cleric have a child who will free Bel Shalor. In this case, rather than trying to kill the adventurers, the mightiest forces in Eberron fight to control their love lives.

What Are the Key Events? Most likely, the adventurers' actions convince a Chamber observer that they are vectors. What are the critical events that will make the Prophecy come to pass? Does the fighter pull a sword from a stone? Is the wizard struck by lightning six times? The party might have to win a key battle or acquire a certain artifact; the pivotal event might be something as simple as a first kiss.

How Much Do the Characters Know? At some point the adventurers need to find out what's going on, and they likely realize that they are being manipulated. When and how do you want this to happen? Will the Chamber agent come forward and reveal that they are vectors? If not, do the player characters notice the disguised dragon? What happens if they mistake it for an enemy and kill it?

RANDOM VECTORS

The issues discussed here assume that you decide which characters are vectors at the start of a campaign and how their story will tie into their role in the Prophecy. You might discuss the issue with the players of those characters first, to make sure they're interested in the story. Another option is to come up with a path for the Prophecy and create a number of vector roles for it, then tie those roles to conditions that any player character could fulfill. Here are a few examples.

- ✦ He Who Slays Odalyth the Undying: The death of a particularly important villain is crucial to the outcome of the Prophecy, and the hero who defeats it is the vector. Which character strikes the killing blow?
- ✦ The One Who Wears the Crying Stone: A powerful artifact is a vector, and the first person who claims it forms a bond that shares its destiny.
- ✦ She Triumphs in Adversity: The Prophecy points to a hero who overcomes many misfortunes. That vector might be the first player who rolls twenty critical failures.
- ✦ Dolurrh Cannot Hold Him: The path shows that the vector is a soul who triumphs repeatedly over death. In your campaign, he or she could be the first adventurer who dies and is resurrected five times.

The path of the Prophecy doesn't begin until the conditions are met. At that point, the vector is identified, and the Prophecy unfolds!

In matters dealing with the Chamber, always remember to think as dragons do: To them, humanoids are puny creatures whose lives pass in the blink of an eye. Most dragons are concerned only with threats that endanger Argonnessen in some way, and they rarely take notice of what happens to a few mortals. During the Elf-Giant War, for example, the dragons didn't intervene until the actions of the giants threatened all of Eberron—and their solution devastated elves and dragons alike.

The return of Bel Shalor is a threat to both mortals and dragons, so player characters and the Chamber would find common cause in preventing it. Not all situations are so clear-cut, though. A Chamber shaper might know of a path in the Prophecy showing that an adventurer will cause a second Mourning that destroys Breland. However, this event paves the way for the ultimate defeat of Tiamat a century later, a vital goal for the dragons. The shaper can't kill that character without losing the vector, but it will do its best to manipulate him or her into following the desired path. Even preservers might wish to support that outcome, while allowing the hero to make his or her own choices. The conflict between the long plans of the Chamber and the adventurers' interests can drive interesting stories.

The Role of Dragonmarks

Students of the Prophecy can learn things from observing interactions or chance encounters between dragonmarked individuals, but not everyone who bears a dragonmark has a role to play in the Prophecy. Think of dragonmarked heirs as Tarot cards or rune stones: tools that can be used to read the future. A cartomancer who loses a deck of cards can always get another, but each vector is unique. Even if you decide that all the vectors in your campaign are dragonmarked heirs, not all such heirs should be vectors.

About the Author

Keith Baker is the creator of the Eberron® campaign setting and designer of the card game *Gloom*. Contrary to popular belief, his success did not involve an infernal pact of any kind, and he does not possess a fearsome hellcow familiar.

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D&D Outsider: Crossing the Grand Canon

Written by Jared von Hindman

Illustrated by Jared von Hindman, William O'Connor, and Ralph Horsley

When I first sat down to start writing about the City of Splendors, I had a vision—a vision I called "CSI: Waterdeep." Forensic Rituals and alchemical labwork made necessary by the city's protection from tracking spells . . . a Faerûnian cop drama at its finest as signal flare spells alerted players to the next scene of the crime. It was such a pretty idea but it was not meant to be.

As I dove into my research, an unseen force slowly insinuated itself into the piece, slowly devouring my ideas for this fictional urban sprawl. This wicked force was, of course, Realmslore, the canonical encyclopedia of madness that makes up the Forgotten Realms. What started out as a "Hey, that's interesting! I wonder if I can find out more about that?" ended up with me interviewing writers, dusting off old books, and even reading old Forgotten Realms comic books. My editor warned me about diving too deep into this abyss: "You don't want your audience to feel like they need to have a Ph.D. in D&D Lore in order to understand your column." He was right, but now it's too late for me.

I have seen infinity, not to mention the original annotated draft of *City of Splendors: Waterdeep*. There is no going back once you've flipped through what can only be described as the Necronomicon of Realmslore.

CSI: Waterdeep still lingers in my mind like a childhood memory, innocent and free, but I somehow think it'd be more useful for me to share the journey and the lessons I learned as I tried to get a grasp of a D&D setting that is older than I am.

"How hard could figuring out Waterdeep be?" asked the foolish freelancer. "It's only one city in an entire fictional world, right?" I can't be the only one devoured by this lurking leviathan and thus I share with you my descent into madness. Along the way, we'll have a little powwow on how to *safely* wrestle with Realmslore (or continuity from any other setting with enough background material to make Tokyo deploy G-Force or assemble Voltron in retaliation), throw around the idea of "modular lore," and examine just how best to survive the brunt of sustained canon fire.

Quoth the Raven Queen: Read. Some. More.

With a roadmap for CSI: Waterdeep sketched out, I pulled out my copies of the Forgotten Realms books to see what bits of Realmslore I could tie into my idea. Then, to my initial joy—which would soon enough turn to horror—I found out that 4th Edition FR only had eight pages on Waterdeep between the *Player's Guide* and the *Campaign Guide*. These pages inspired exciting stories but were crafted with a subliminal code that said, "Hey, Jared, why don't you just open one more book? What harm could it do?" What were those giant statues that don't work anymore all about? So all the griffons are dead but . . . wait, why were they mentioning griffons that weren't there in the first place? There was no way I could give an honest nod to Waterdeep using just the tools before me.

It was at this point that someone handed me the 3.5 supplement *City of Splendors: Waterdeep*, by Eric L. Boyd, and nothing would ever be the same.

Save for one long ago D&D game where I power cleaved my way through my first campaign by playing a half-orc too dumb to know anything about the current realm, let alone any forgotten ones (making roleplaying easy), this was an alien land by edition alone. I had no idea how much I didn't know. Perhaps that's what lowered my defenses, making me easy prey to the whispers of Realmslore that gently knocked upon my chamber door.

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The first thing that scared me about *City of Splendors*? The "What you Need to Play" paragraph, detailing the other tomes you would need to fully understand the material referenced within this book. For example, the mechanics and history behind why a certain monastery in Waterdeep is made up of Kung Fu Madness. Perhaps that's not scary unto itself, until you realize that this paragraph cited thirty different D&D books and supplements that would be required to get the full measure out of *City of Splendors*. I know that this was a trend in older editions, and now I realize even more why the online character builder and compendium are things I would marry if I thought for a moment they might be thinking about leaving me for someone else.

City of Splendors itself is an insanely detailed accounting of all things Waterdeep and required me to decode a few things but soon enough I was poring over the densest 157-page book I'd ever held in my hands, trying to find a touchstone for CSI: Waterdeep . . . anything that jumped out at me from amid the constant flow of Realmslore sluicing through my brain's trivia center. That's when I saw my salvation. It was love at first sight, and it wielded a badge and greataxe.

Even in the middle of a book about the infinite details of a fantastical city rich with conspiracy, drama, and sewer maps, finding the image of a frost giant under "Player Options" was just flippin' weird enough that I had to look deeper. Harshnag the Grim is a member of the Gray Hands which is, quite literally, Waterdeep's elite S.W.A.T. team that gets deployed to deal with demonic invasions, rampaging behemoths, and adventurers who think they can get away with killing city guards just because they're several levels higher than most creatures on the city's payroll.

That's right, Waterdeep has an extreme action solution for dealing with player characters who are setting-wrecking jerks. The Gray Hands have an unlimited budget, permission to make buildings explode, and assurance that the priests will use speak with dead to sort out the bodies afterward. For a short while I wanted to base my CSI: Waterdeep piece on these NPCs alone because if anything wrote itself it was "The Adventures of Frost Giant Axe Cop and Friends." This is what I would later come to call "The Honeymoon Period" of my time with Realmslore.

Everything looks so pretty and bright but this relationship came with a lot of baggage, mostly published by TSR.

The Shiny, Candy-Like Button That Led to My Destruction

The Gray Hands really did read like a super-team you'd see on Adult Swim, and my love for them and how they fit into my CSI: Waterdeep scheme ended up being my undoing. Let's look at the bait Realmslore used to lure me and see if you can spot the moment things started to go sour.

Led by a half-petrified ranger who deploys packs of blink dogs, the team touched on a whole spectrum of weirdness (not including the genie on the payroll). Besides Harshnag the Grim (a frost giant with a heart of chaotic-gold who demanded that you respect his double-bladed authoritay), the team included Asper, a fighter described as a "lithe, petite beauty" that is married to Mirt the Moneylender. While the backstory of their relationship is more than a little bit creepy—with the monstrously obese Mirt saving her as a baby and raising her to be his wife (!)—there's a disconnect within the pages of the book that keeps her an interesting character. You see, while she sounds like a petite victim of the disgusting, walrus-shaped Mirt, if you turn the page you see an image of her in full plate armor gut-checking a huge demon with her bare fists. Her armor isn't sexy at all, and it's clear that she can totally take care of herself, making me feel the description of "lithe, petite beauty" is something Mirt creepily lisps when the Lords of Waterdeep meet for coffee, and he knows Asper is well out of hearing range. Lastly and most horrifically, the team has Hrusse of Assuran, a character so convoluted that it required hours of research just for me to unravel what the crap he was all about.

This the problem with such well-documented canon is . . . you can't just drop random words at me and expect me not to try to sort them out. In the end I figured out that, in 3rd Edition, Hrusse is a Cleric of Revenge cast out of his own country of Unther because his God got murdered. Wait . . . where is Unther?

::insert sound of more research here::

You have no idea how long it took me to figure out that Unther was the land in the Forgotten Realms that was crushed by Tymanther, the land of the dragonborn. You thought YOU had a reason to hate Dragonborn? Here's a guy that, when I pull him into my 4th Edition game, is going to be *furious* because not only is his deity of choice still dead but *his country doesn't exist and was replaced by dragonborn*. All you forum folk upset about 4E's iconic new race have nothing to complain about next to Hrusse.

The Gray Hands cover the spectrum of weird in D&D but also tap into bigger issues. It was this appeal that made me stick around even when Realmslore started to become abusive. All I wanted to do was find out about the S.W.A.T. team of Waterdeep, and in order to do so I had to scour books just to understand what one of the members' background was. And even then, I still had that "I'm missing something" vibe.

Sure, there was more information here than anywhere I'd seen previously, but it felt abridged and concentrated, implying I had more digging to do. As a fan who was committed to using the Gray Hands, I had little choice. But before I get into the ensuing mental breakdown, let's step back for a moment. We've earned it.

Wizards of the Coast Gave Me Blankets Covered in Spellplague

Enjoy some vital TSR Lore in easy-to-swallow form.

When Jeff Grubb and Ed Greenwood got together to write the official Forgotten Realms book, the world was originally named Toril. Since being earlier in the alphabet was all the crazy in the mid-1980s, they added the meaningless word Abeir to it, creating Abeir-Toril as the planet containing realms someone forgot. Fast forward to 4th Edition. The Spellplague hits and, well, changes a lot of what fans thought they knew. We get new races that have been around the whole time and we lose places like *Maztica* (because no one really wanted to go to D&D Meso-America anyway).

In 4th Edition, we find out that when the gods fought the primordials, they bribed the primordials with a planet of their own, a twin reflection of Toril named Abeir. Then the Spellplague had that planet crash into Toril, doing a lot of horrible things but on the whole making everything more . . . interesting (yeah, that's the word). New classes, new races, new power sources, and a new cosmology for everyone! Plus the Spellplague pushed the Forgotten Realms setting ahead in time by 100 years.

Translation?

Every mortal NPC in every existing Waterdeep book has died of old age by the time you start rolling dice in your 4th Edition campaign. (I'm told in the novels that some of the cool characters got a time-traveling Get Out of Spellplague Free card, but you get my point.) This leaves open the question of why I should even bother poring over all this canon which, it turns out, is nothing more but ancient history.

But let's leave that question for later. Right now, let's get back to my misadventures splashing around in the stream of continuity.

Getting My Realmslore Ph.D.: A Cautionary Tale

Still seeking the origins of the Gray Hands, I did the only obvious thing—I wrote to the author, Eric L. Boyd. Yes, I became that nerdy guy contacting him at 4:00 in the morning to ask him hyper-specific questions about frost giants and blink dog rangers from a book he wrote seven years ago. He was very nice and pointed me to the *City System* boxed set, written in 1988. I got my hands on that book, and again it looked like I was reading an excerpt from something else.

::insert sound of head hitting desk::

So I wrote to Jeff Grubb, who pointed me to another book, plus a few issues of the DC Comics *Forgotten Realms* run that *featured* Force Grey (the Gray Hands' original name), and a short story anthology. He also wasn't able to say for sure whether or not he was 100% responsible for Force Grey. Why, Jeff, why couldn't the yellow brick road end here?

::insert sound of head hitting desk repeatedly::

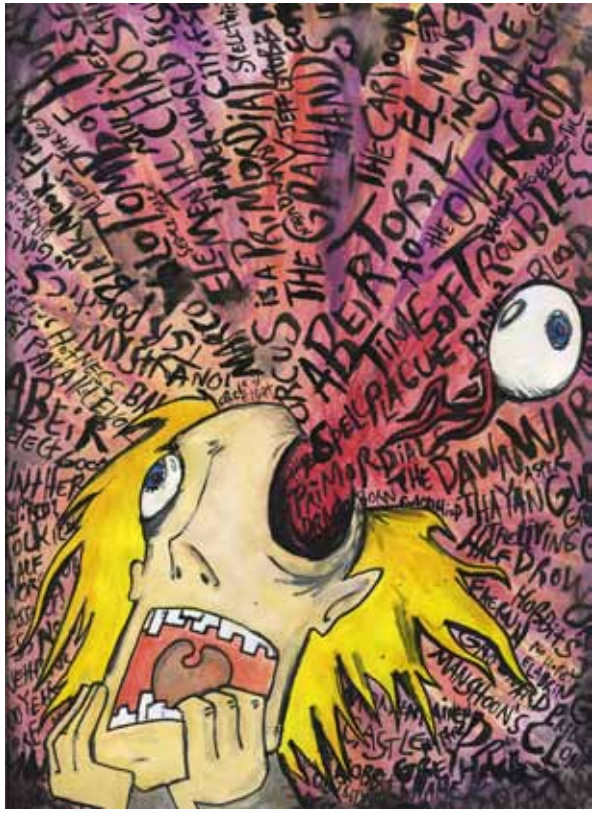
No matter how rewarding it was to see Officer Harshnag arrest a beholder crimelord in a comic book, I wasn't done. Here I was, simply trying to hunt down the origin of Waterdeep's S.W.A.T. team and I literally was bouncing around all over the place, my face and desk taking more and more damage as each person points me somewhere different. Then, it arrived in my in-box—the Thing I Could Not Unsee.

My editor and Eric L. Boyd got together, decided that they didn't like me anymore, and gave me exactly what I was looking for—the fully annotated draft of *City of Splendors: Waterdeep*. And when I say "fully annotated," I mean *fully annotated*. Containing citations for every tiny detail that came from a previously published novel, web page, comic book, supplement, or canonical t-shirt meticulously organized by Eric.

What did I learn? No one should try to hunt down the origins of anything they see in the Forgotten

Realms. It will only cost you Sanity Points. That and I don't think we give enough credit to the brave folks who man the trench that is Realmslore. Take this example from Eric L. Boyd's annotated original draft of the 3.5 *City of Splendors: Waterdeep* concerning just one NPC:

Laeral Silverhand Arunsun
Dragon 181, pages 18–19; *Pages from the Mages*, pages 71–72; FR5 *The Savage Frontier*, page 52; *The North: The Wilderness*, page 57; *Volo's Guide to All Things Magical*, pages 101–102; *The Dream Spheres*, page 82; Steven Schend's unpublished Khelben timeline. My logic is that *Dragon 181* was a circa 1358 product. Therefore, we know Laeral was rescued in the year before, 1357



DR. This also matches up with *Volo's Guide to All Things Magical*. *The Crown of Horns* had to be in Blackstaff Tower at the time of Myrkul's destruction (i.e. by early 1358 DR). Although FR5 *The Savage Frontier* (circa 1358) implies she's still there, that would be the simulacrum mentioned in *The North*. If Laeral was rescued in 1357 DR and she was a "merry lass" 20 years before (as noted in *Dragon 181* and *Pages from the Mages*), then she must have donned the Crown in 1337 DR, which is the aptly named "Year of the Wandering Maiden."

Man! If you ever thought of writing for FR, the above should help dissuade you from any such folly. Note the offhanded mention of "Steven Schend's unpublished Khelben timeline. *Unpublished*. Or the fact that Eric is solving a narrative puzzle from contradicting clues found all over the place. Thank Kord for simulacrums . . . I'm sure they've solved many a plot knot over the years.

So, still think you're hardcore enough to roll with the Realms? Are you willing to answer questions like "What class does Bronwyn Caradoon belong to?" and for extra credit: "Where is the canonical reference to her tramp stamp?" One more annotation from Boyd's original annotations:

Dragon 251 – "Thornhold," page 87. Although in 2E Bronwyn was an 8th-level bard, she had not evinced any spellcasting ability. Notes from *Thornhold*: Magic bag (page 11), wields a quarterstaff (page 13) and stiletto (page 38). She is a young Harper (pages 31–32) whose missions mostly involve carrying messages. She was about 4 in 1368, [at] 20 sold into slavery in Amn. Her rear is marked by crimson oak-like tattoo (page 36–37).

You know, because if you need to look up the details of Bronwyn's booty ink, now you know which page to find it on.

The annotated manuscript is amazing, citing over 74 novels, D&D books, comic books, several score issues of *Dragon*/*Dungeon*/*Polyhedron* magazines, multiple unpublished timelines and family trees of famous characters, and one video game. And you know what? It's too much. There's only an endless horizon promising only more Realmslore. My mind was blown just by looking for the origins of Frost Giant Axe Cop & his Player-Character-Killing S.W.A.T. team—a tiny droplet in the setting's ocean of content. Get me my straitjacket and put a fork in me. Like a baked potato found in the employee lounge of a mental institution, I'm done.

Ed Greenwood: Still Protecting Us from His Frankenstein Creation

If you haven't figured it out by now, I was deep in the throws of a Realmslore seizure. How was a regular DM supposed to get a degree in Realmslore and still have time to run a game or two? With no place else to go, I decided to just ambush Ed Greenwood on Facebook. (I told you, I was at the end of my rope.) Please, Sir Ed of Greenwood, save me. This is all your fault, after all. You owe it to me—I mean us! Us players!

And I do mean that I "ambushed" him, sending a simple message that contained hid the ocean of confusion and despair in which I was drowning, ready to pounce on him if he, the Sage of Shadowdale, could not give me counsel. "Dear Mr. Greenwood," I wrote. "I'm wondering if you could confirm the rumor that you shed a single tear whenever a DM changes a canonical detail of the Realms?"

Behold his actual and honest response:

Heh. Goodness, no, I EXPECT every DM's Realms to be different from mine. The published Realms are different from mine, after all, and almost all gamers I know who buy published adventures (even back in the day when they

were "modules" only available from TSR or Judges Guild, relatively few products that everyone waited excitedly for) changed them to suit their playing group or their ongoing campaign, or just read them to cherry-pick ideas instead of running them. That's what gamers DO. Yet because thousands of gamers are doing it, we have to strive to publish a consistent Realms setting ("canon," if you will) so everything doesn't descend into utter confusion. Heck, I'm confused right now. :)

As for a new player wrangling the load of lore about Waterdeep: that's the DM's job. If you're visiting Waterdeep, you just learn as you go, with the DM describing the sights, sounds, and smells around you, starting with soaring Mount Waterdeep and the city wall, and its gates, then the fishy smell of the harbor and frowning Castle Waterdeep, then the city wards . . . However, if the campaign assumes the PCs are FROM Waterdeep, well, before play begins, the DM should lay out the map of the city (because if you live there, you DO know the layout of the streets), and do a quick, informal tour of the wards and who lives there (from rich Sea Ward down to stinking Dock Ward, LINKING things in the tour to the PCs, e.g. "which is where you live, Fredolph, and you usually shop for greens at Mother Tatha's, here, and go drinking at The Famous Flagon HERE, and –").

Then, BECAUSE the lore-load is so overwhelming, the DM should sit back and take player questions. Let the players look at the map and their character sheets and back stories, and ask all the questions they want. Tell them to take notes of the answers. It can be a great hour or two of "mastering your world." THEN play can begin. If any of the players are college students or remember their college days well, and they lived away from home at the institution, just go back to all of those concerns: Where did you get your cash? How did you do your laundry? Food? Entertainment? If the DM can answer all of those quickly, and the players ask them, they "know" their little bit of Waterdeep, which is SUPPOSED to be huge, bustling, and "too much" for any one person to "know all about," just like New York or Chicago. Then get rolling into roleplaying, and don't worry about the lore. If the style of play is "think and speak in-character," then the metagaming mindset of "staring down at a board from above and Knowing All" fades away, and the game stays fun, because you can have mysteries and suchlike. There you go.

Hugs, Ed

Somewhere, church bells rang loudly. I swung open the shutters, redeemed Scrooge-like, and breathed in fresh air that had no whiff of Realmslore. With a wave of relief, the creator of the Forgotten Realms canonically said it was okay for me to not take on the Grand Canon in a crazy Rambo-themed suicide mission.

I was thinking I was done here. I'd managed to plumb the depths of Realmslore and find the source that enabled my CSI: Waterdeep idea. It was a shame that I couldn't actually use the Gray Hands, but they were kinda "murdered" along with the entire population of Waterdeep in the leap ahead to modern

To outsiders, Mirt appears to be little more than a drunk and a braggart. This disguise hides his true cunning and wit.
Mirt the Moneylender
At the end of the game, you score 4 for each Commerce Quest and each Piety Quest you completed.
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Forgotten Realms. At least they could function as a thematic touchstone for those who followed and to tried to mimic the rich heritage of decades of material.

But my attitude changed again when I saw Mirt the Moneylender on the website last month as part of the preview of the new *Lords of Waterdeep* board game.

The hell?

Wasn't he dead? Did I miss a novel somewhere describing how Mirt got himself a time machine? Was he a simulacrum? What was going on here?

::sound of a cartoonist collapsing, his head cushioned by a keyboard::

When I awoke and took my meds, I got some info from the design team at Wizards and it all clicked into place.

The Lords of Waterdeep game is set during the 3rd Edition timeline for Waterdeep and relies on 2nd Edition sources for fleshing out the stories it contains. Yes, this is the first product we've seen since the launch of 4th Edition that revisits something from D&D's yesteryear—not updates it to modern times, but actually goes back a inhabits the setting as it used to be. If you haven't figured out by now, that's a pretty cool thing for longtime fans of Waterdeep.

And, for new fans of Waterdeep, it brings up an interesting point. There's nothing that says you can't use the fully fleshed out *City of Splendors* book to populate the Waterdeep of your 4th Edition campaign. Or you can combine the 3E and 4E sources to include the new districts. Heck, you can even rewind further to a period of the Realms where everyone discovered monotheism with the OverGod.

Go crazy!

Naturally, you have to balance this with how much your players love the existing Waterdeep Realmslore. I always try to make a game setting my own, making it obviously different enough that I can usually sidestep the guy who has read all the source material and

interrupts my storytelling by announcing that he's going to the secret gambling den hidden beneath the floorboards of the church because he's a gambler and therefore knows it's there.

My best advice is to be hit-or-miss when people pull this kind of thing. Use the Realmslore when it works for you. When it doesn't, tell the player that the anomaly is "a mystery you can look into later." And if he decides to take you up on that offer? Well, at the very least you bought yourself some time to figure out what in the world he was talking about. It can be rough when a player seems to know more about your setting than you do, but don't let them run things from the Realmslore seat—it's up to you to make sure that the group knows that this is *your* Waterdeep.

Splendid Reading

If, even after my tale of personal tragedy and ruin, you still find yourself yearning to make your game resound with the Waterdhavian Realmslore, I offer the following recommendations for sourcebooks that will let you run Waterdeep in retro style.

City System Boxed Set, by Jeff Grubb with Ed Greenwood (1988)
The smart antique D&D collector will enjoy this boxed set full of detailed maps, the laws and punishments of Waterdeep, and more random weird charts than you can roll a die at. Each region gets a "random guy you could bump into" chart, meaning that at the same time it pushes my desire for insane charts, it also fleshes out the setting by telling you just the kind of people you see when traveling the historic streets of Waterdeep. I tried it twice and got "dung sweepers" both times, so hopefully you'll have better luck than I did. Also, this product has no game mechanics, making it practically timeless!

Volo's Guide to Waterdeep, by Ed Greenwood (1992)
Want to know the best bars, inns, and places to mug folks in Waterdeep? This guide written in character by someone who is not Marco Polo is also mechanics-free, instead acting like a cross between Google Maps and Wikipedia, if Wikipedia was written by a rogue who drank too much, liked crime novels, and was quick with his sneak attack dice.

City of Splendors: Waterdeep, Eric L. Boyd (2005)
If you aren't afraid of the 3.5 mechanics littering the book, you won't find a better all-purpose vehicle for Waterdeep. As I've just spend several pages describing the kind of research hidden within its pages, its worth (and madness) is pretty self-explanatory.

If I hadn't had my little Realmslore breakdown, I don't think I would have understood why the *Lords of Waterdeep* game decided to turn back the clock. Now that I've seen too much, I can't fathom them having made any other choice. Check it out, Waterdeep fans, and remember: If you see something curious, don't give in to the desire to find out more. Let the notion of "modular lore" into your heart, and may your campaign be fluid and migraine-free. Realmslore may look pretty, but she'll only hurt you if you let her get too close.

Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go threaten to crush my players with a frost giant armed with a badge and a greataxe. It's the best therapy for my current state that I can think of.

Deploy the Blink Dogs of War!

Hugs, Jared

"If Ed Greenwood thinks hugs are cool,
I'm willing to go along with it."

About the Author

Jared von Hindman is an artist and sometime comedian who "dug too deep" while researching Stupid Monsters of Dungeons & Dragons. He awoke something dire and horrible (perhaps fiendish, even), and now he spends his days playing with plastic elves and illustrating new and creative ways to kill goblins. Currently, he resides in Berlin with an older woman and a snake named Slinky. He's not sure why his pet needs to be included in his bio, but all the cool kids seem to be doing it, and Jared's a sucker for peer pressure.

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